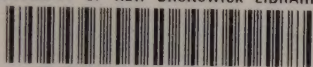


PR5177.076 1928

Orphan Dinah /
UNIVERSITY OF NEW BRUNSWICK LIBRARIES



3 9950 00366620 4

WITHDRAWN

ST. THOMAS

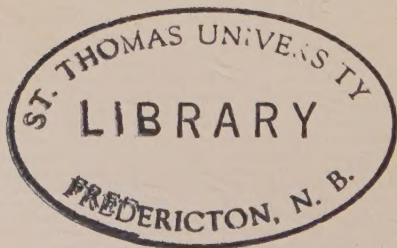


UNIVERSITY

MIRAMICHI

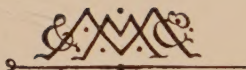
THE
BEAVERBROOK
LIBRARY

DOCE ME
BONITATEM ET DISCIPLINAM ET
SCIENTIAM



THE WIDECOMBE EDITION
OF EDEN PHILLPOTTS'S DARTMOOR
NOVELS IN TWENTY VOLUMES

VOLUME THIRTEEN
ORPHAN DINAH



MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
LONDON • BOMBAY • CALCUTTA • MADRAS
MELBOURNE

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
NEW YORK • BOSTON • CHICAGO
DALLAS • SAN FRANCISCO

THE MACMILLAN CO. OF CANADA, LTD.
TORONTO

FRONTISPIECE

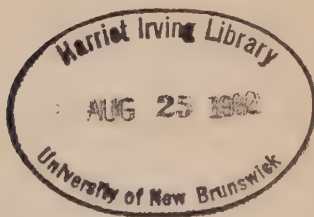
BY CECIL HUNT, R.W.S.

“High on the cliff above them a face bulked enormous
and stared into the eye of the westering sun.”



ORPHAN DINAH

BY
EDEN PHILLPOTTS



MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON
1928

5314

COPYRIGHT

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
BY R. & R. CLARK, LIMITED, EDINBURGH

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I		PAGE
THE HILLTOP		I
CHAPTER II		
FALCON FARM		5
CHAPTER III		
SUPPER		12
CHAPTER IV		
AT BUCKLAND-IN-THE-MOOR		25
CHAPTER V		
THE ACCIDENT		35
CHAPTER VI		
ON HAZEL TOR		47
CHAPTER VII		
AT GREEN HAYES		57
CHAPTER VIII		
THE OLD FOX-HUNTER		71

CHAPTER IX	
A HOLIDAY FOR SUSAN	PAGE 82
CHAPTER X	
TALKING WITH DINAH	88
CHAPTER XI	
NEW BRIDGE	99
CHAPTER XII	
AFTERWARDS	105
CHAPTER XIII	
JOE ON ECONOMICS	115
CHAPTER XIV	
THE FACE ON THE ROCK	124
CHAPTER XV	
BEN BAMSEY'S DOUBTS	135
CHAPTER XVI	
SUNDAY	143
CHAPTER XVII	
DINAH	157
CHAPTER XVIII	
MAYNARD	168
CHAPTER XIX	
LIGHT OF AUTUMN	178

CONTENTS

ix

CHAPTER XX

THE HUNTER'S HORN	PAGE 183
-----------------------------	-------------

CHAPTER XXI

FUNERAL	198
-------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXII

AT WATERSMEET	204
-------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXIII

IN A SICK-ROOM	213
--------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXIV

' THE REST IS EASY '	222
--------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXV

JOHN AND JOE	233
------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXVI

MR. PALK SEEKS ADVICE	240
---------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXVII

DISCOVERY	245
---------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE LAW	259
-------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXIX

JOE TAKES IT ILL	268
----------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXX

THE NEST	274
--------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXXI

JOB'S SUNDAY	PAGE 286
------------------------	-------------

CHAPTER XXXII

JANE AND JERRY	298
--------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXXIII

JOE HEARS THE SECRET	310
--------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXXIV

AN OFFER	321
--------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXXV

FOR RIGHT AND JUSTICE	329
---------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE WEDDING DAY	337
---------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXXVII

SHEPHERD'S CROSS	343
----------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXXVIII

RETURN FROM THE HONEYMOON	358
-------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER I

THE HILLTOP

THE SPECTACLE of free horizons from Buckland Beacon, at the southern rampart of Dartmoor, affords a vision orbicular and complete. Its gracious, yet austere, composition and its far-flung arena for the masques and interludes of the dancing hours render it a centre of sleepless variation. Its native fabrics, now gay, now solemn, are a fit habit for the lyrical and epic seasons, and its garments are transformed, not only by the robings and disrobings of Spring and Winter, but at a point's change in the wind, at a rise or fall of temperature. These delicacies, with the more patent magic of fore-glow and dawn, sunset, after-glow and gloaming, are revealed under most perfect conditions; for earth here responds to air in all its heights and depths so completely that each phenomenon finds all needful for achievement.

In this hour, after noon on a day of mid September, the light was changing, not gradually at the sun's proper declension, but under the forces of a south-west wind bringing up vapour at twenty miles an hour from the distant sea.

From the rounded and weathered masses of the Beacon, the hill sloped abruptly and a receding

foreground of dying fern and granite boulders broke on a gap of such extent that earth, reappearing far below, was already washed by the milky azure of the air, through which it glimmered, receded, and again rose to lofty hills beyond. The ground plan was a mighty cup, over which the valley undulated, rising here to knap and knoll, falling there into coombs and plains, sinking to its lowest depths immediately beneath the view point, where wound the river Dart. Upon a distant and irregular line, now melting into the thick air, border heights and salencies sank and rose, repeating on a vaster scale the anatomy of the river basin.

A chief quality of this spectacle appeared in the three dissimilar and different coverings that draped it. The body of the earth lay wrapped in a triple robe, and each garment was slashed and broken, so that its texture flowed into and revealed the others. Every furlong of these rolling leagues, save only where the river looped and twined through the middle distance, was clad with forest, with field, or with wilderness of heath and stone; and all, preserving their special qualities, added character of contrast to their neighbours. There was not a monotonous passage from east to west. Tilth and meadow oozed out through coppice and hanger; the forests ascended the steep places and fledged the hills, only drooping their dark wings where furze and stone climbed higher yet, until they heaved upon the sky. The heights changed not, save to the painting of the seasons; the woods, that seemed as ancient as they, were largely the work of man, even as the patterns of the fields that spread, shorn of their corn, or still green with their roots, among them. The verdant

patchwork of mangel and swede, the grey of arrish, and the gloom of freshly broken earth bosomed out in gentle arcs among the forests, breaking their ragged edges with long smooth billows of colour. They shone against the summer sobriety of the trees, for the solid masses of the foliage were as yet scarcely stained with the approaching breath of the fall. But the woodlands welcomed the light also, and sunshine, already softened by a gathering haze that advanced before the actual clouds, still beat into copse and spinney, to fringing with a nimbus of gold the boss of each great tree and outlining it from the rest with dim and delicate fire.

To-day the highest lights were in the depths, where Dart flashed at a fall, or shone along some placid reach. She was but a streak of polished silver seen from aloft, and her manifold beauties hidden; while other remote spots and sparks of light that held the eye conveyed no detail either. They meant a mansion, or the white or rosy wash on cottage faces. Here and there blue feathers of wood smoke melted upward into the oncoming clouds; and thinly, through vapours beyond, like a tangle of thread, there twined high roads, ascending from invisible bridges and hamlets to the hills.

And then, little by little, detail faded and the shadows of the clouds grew denser, the body of the clouds extended. Still they were edged with light, but the light died as they thickened and lumbered forward, spreading their pinions over the Vale. The air gradually grew opaque, and ridge after ridge, height after height, disappeared in it. They were washed away, until the fingers of the rain felt dumbly along the bosom of Buckland Beacon, dimmed the heath and furze to

greyness, curled over the uplifted boulder, found and slaked the least wafer of gold or ebony lichen that clung thereto.

A young man, who had been standing motionless upon the Beacon, felt the cool brush of the rain upon his face, woke from his reverie, and prepared to descend where a building stood upon the hill below him half a mile distant. There he was expected, but as yet knew it not.

CHAPTER II

FALCON FARM

BENEATH THE BEACON, perched among open fields, that quilted the southern slope, there stood a stone house. Here was Falcon Farm, and over it the hawks that had given it a name would often poise and soar and utter their complaining cries. The cluster of buildings perched on the hillside consisted of a dwelling house, with cartsheds, a cowhouse and stable, and a fine barn assembled round the farmyard. About them stretched square fields, off some of which a harvest of oats had just been shorn; while others were grass green with the foliage of turnip. Beneath, between the farmhouse and the wooded road, extended meadows into which fern and heath were intruding ominously. A wedge of kitchen garden was scooped out of the hill beside the yard, and a dry-built wall fell from the shoulder of the Beacon above, broke at Falcon Farm, and with diverging arms separated its field and fallow from the surrounding wild.

The door of the dwelling faced west, and here stood a man talking to a woman.

He was of sturdy build, with a clean-shaved, fresh-coloured face, and head growing bald. His countenance was plump and little wrinkled. His

eyes were grey and, having long learned the value of direct vision in affairs, he fixed them upon people when he talked. Mr. Joseph Stockman declared himself to be in sight of seventy; but his neighbours believed this assertion of age no more than an excuse for his manner of life.

Indeed, at this moment, his companion was uttering a pleasantry at the farmer's expense. She had come on an errand from Buckland village, a mile away, and loitered because she esteemed the humorous qualities of Mr. Stockman and herself found laughter a sauce to existence. She needed this addition. Her lot had not been one of great emotions or pleasures, for Melinda Honeysett was a widow after three uneven years of marriage. They passed before she was five-and-twenty, when a drunken husband, riding a horse that would not 'carry beer,' was pitched off in the night on Dunstone Down and broke his neck. She had no children, and now lived with a bed-ridden father and ministered to him in the village. This had been her life for nearly twenty years. She was a connection of Joseph Stockman through her marriage, for the Bamseys and the Stockmans and the Honeysetts were related.

"A day of great events," said the farmer. "My two new hands both coming and, as my manner is, I hope the best, but fear the worst."

"A horseman and a cowman, so Susan said."

"Yes. But that means more than the words on a little place like this, as I made clear. In fact, they've got to do pretty much everything—with such help as I can give and Neddy Tutt."

"Hope they'll be all right. But they mustn't count on a poor, weak, old man like you, of course."

Mr. Stockman looked into Melinda's face. She was a chubby red-haired woman built on massive lines, with a bosom that threatened to burst its lavender print, and a broad beamy body beneath. She had a pair of pale blue eyes and a mouth not devoid of character. She wore a white sunbonnet and carried a basket, now full of small carrots and large lettuces.

"You poke your fun at me, forgetting I've done ten men's work in my time and must slack off," he said. "Because, thanks to plain living and the widowed state with all its restfulness, I don't look my age, that's not to say I don't feel it. There's certain rights I owe to myself—the only person as ever I did owe anything to in my life—and even if I was fool enough to want to make a martyr of myself, Soosie-Toosie would never let me."

"I'm sure she wouldn't."

"My daughter knows where the shoe pinches; and that's in my breathing parts."

"Poor chap!"

He shook his head.

"You be among the unbelievers, I see."

"But the new men. Tell me about them. What are they like?"

"Ah, you females! It's always the outside of a man as interests you. For my part it was their characters that I had to think about; and even so I've took one largely on trust."

"You're such a trustful creature, Joe."

"One man I have seen, t'other I have not. Thomas Palk, the horseman, is in sight of middle-age and a towser for work. A very good man by all accounts. A faithful-looking man, and I hope he'll prove so. A mighty ugly man; but an honest face if I know anything."

"Sounds all right."

"T'other I haven't seen. He comes from up country and answered my advertisement. Can't give no character direct, because his master's died sudden. But he writes a very good letter. Lawrence Maynard he's called. Both free men—no encumbrances. I hope they'll soon be pulling their weight and getting things all ship-shape."

"Father says nobody knows better than you what work means; but somebody else has always got to do it."

"A wonderful man your father; yet I'm very much afraid he'll go to hell when the end comes, Melinda."

"He's not afraid he will."

A ginger-coloured lurcher appeared. It was a gaunt and hideous dog with a white muzzle. Behind it came a black spaniel and a white wire-haired fox-terrier.

"Us must get to work," said Mr. Stockman. "Soosie-Toosie wants a brace of rabbits for supper to-night and I'd best to fight for 'em afore the rain comes."

At this moment another woman joined them.

"What's the matter now, Soosie? The rabbits? I be just going after 'em."

But Miss Stockman, Joseph's only child, had not come about the rabbits. She was a woman resembling her father in no respect. Her hair was black, lustreless, and rough, her brown face disfigured by a 'port wine' stain that descended from her forehead to her cheek. Her expression was anxious and careworn, and, though large-boned and powerfully made, she was thin. She had brown eyes, a mouth with sad lips, and a

pleading voice, which seemed to have the same querulous note as the hawks that so often hung in air above her home.

"Mr. Maynard's box have come, father," she said. "Does he live in the house, or go in the tallet over the stables? Both rooms are sweet and ready for 'em."

"Trust you for that, Soosie," declared Melinda.

"The horseman goes over the stables, as being the right and proper place for him," said Mr. Stockman. "And if there was a dwelling room over the cows, the cowman would go there. But there is not, so he'll come in the house."

"Right, then," answered his daughter. "Mr. Maynard comes in the house; Mr. Palk goes over the hosses."

Susan disappeared and Mrs. Honeysett prepared to depart.

"And you tell your father that so soon as the woodcock be back—not long now—he'll have the first."

"And when you shoot it, you come in and have a yarn with father."

She descended down the farm road to the highway beneath, and Joseph, getting his gun, went upwards with his rejoicing dogs into the fern brakes on the side of the Beacon.

Here, in the pursuit of the only exercise he really loved, Joe Stockman forgot his alleged years. He was a steady shot, though it suited him to pretend that failing sight interfered very seriously with his sport; but he excelled still in the difficult business of snapping rabbits in fern. Thus engaged, with his dogs to help him, he became oblivious of weather, and it was not until the sight of an approaching stranger arrested him

that he grew conscious of the rain. Then he turned up his collar over his blue woollen shirt and swore.

The man who had recently surveyed Dart Vale from the summit of the rocks above was now descending, and, seeing the farmer, turned his steps towards him. He was a slight-built but well-knit youth of seven or eight and twenty. His face was resolute and cleanly turned, his skin clear and of a natural olive, that his open-air life had tanned. He wore a small black moustache over a stern mouth, and his eyes were very dark brown and of a restless and inquiring expression. On his left arm over the elbow was a mourning band.

"Sorry to spoil sport," he said, in a quick clear voice somewhat low pitched, "but I'm a stranger in these parts and want Falcon Farm. Be I right for it?"

"Very right indeed," answered Mr. Stockman. "In fact, so right that it's under your nose. There's Falcon Farm, and I'm the farmer, and I guess you're Lawrence Maynard, due to-day."

The other smiled, and his habitual solemnity lifted off his face.

"That's right. I walked from Bovey, because I wanted to have a look at the country."

"And what d'you think of it?"

"Fine. After flat Somerset it makes your legs wake up."

"There's nothing like a hilly country for tightening the muscles. The Shire hosses find that out when they come here. Yes, that's Falcon Farm. And there's the cows—all red Devons."

The newcomer looked down upon a little cluster of kine grazing in a meadow.

"A beautiful spot, sure enough. And snug by the look of it."

"Nothing to grumble at for high land. But it calls for work. I've been here five-and-twenty year and made it what it is; but I'm old for my age, along of hard labour in all weathers, and can't do all I would. However, we'll tell about it later when my other new man, Thomas Palk, arrives. Horseman, he is; but, as I explained, you and him are going to be my right and left hand now, and I can see you're the sort that will justify yourself from the first."

"I hope so."

"Heave up them rabbits, then, and we'll go down-along."

Maynard picked up three heavy rabbits and they went down the hill together.

"We're a small party," explained Joe, "but very friendly, easy people. And you and Palk will find yourselves comfortable, I hope. There's only me and my daughter, Miss Stockman, who rules us men, and a young boy, Neddy Tutt, who's making up into a useful hand. At hay harvest and corn harvest I hire. We've just got home our oats. For the roots, we can pull them ourselves. Of the men who have left me, one went for faults, and we can let the past bury the past; t'other found the winter a thought too hard up here and have gone down to the in-country."

The newcomer felt favourably impressed, for Mr. Stockman had great art to win strangers. He promised to be a kindly and easy man, as he declared himself to be.

Lawrence patted the dogs, who sniffed round him with offers of friendship, and presently all returned together.

CHAPTER III

SUPPER

"I MUST GO and change my coat," said the farmer as they entered the house place. "There was a time when I laughed at a wet jacket, same, no doubt, as you do; but that time's past. Here's my daughter. She'll show you your room."

Susan shook hands, and her hurried fitful smile hovered upon the new arrival.

"Your box be come and I'll give you a hand up," she said. "Your room's in the house at the end of the passage-way facing east. A very comfortable room I hope you'll find."

"Thank you, miss. But I'll fetch up the box if you'll show the way."

He shouldered it and followed her.

"Us'll be having dinner in a minute," she said. "Faither likes it at half after one. Mr. Palk ban't arriving till the afternoon."

During the afternoon Mr. Palk did arrive. He drove up from Ashburton in a trap hired at an inn and brought his luggage with him. He proved a broad and powerful man of fifty, iron grey, close bearded and close cropped. His head was set on a massive neck that lifted above heavy shoulders. His features were huddled together.

His nose turned up and displayed deep nostrils; his mouth was large and shapeless; his eyes were steadfast. He revealed great powers of concentration. He did not see much beyond his immediate vision, but could be clear-sighted enough at close range. He had no humour and received impressions slowly, as a child; but grasped them as a child. A light touch was thrown away on Mr. Palk, as his new master soon found. Nod or wink was alike futile as means of suggestion; but, once grasped, a point might safely be left. He never forgot.

At tea that night Joe Stockman expatiated on the situation and his new men listened, while the lad, Neddy Tutt, a big fair youth, intently regarded them and endeavoured to judge their probable attitude to himself. He was inclined to like both, but doubted not they might develop character averse from his interests.

"There's no manner of doubt that we're a little behind," confessed the master. "There are things you'll be itching to put right this autumn, I expect; and I doubt if men like you will rest till we're up to the mark again. When I was young, I had a hawk's eye for danger, and if I saw the thistles gaining on the meadow-land, or the fern and heath getting in while our backs was turned, I'd fight 'em tooth and nail and scarcely rest in my bed till they was down and out. On Dartmoor the battle's to the strong, for we're up against unsleeping forces of Nature as would rather hinder than help. In a word the work's hard, but I lead the way, so far as my weight of years allow it; and what's more to the point, as you'll find, is my ideas on the subject of

food and money. The money you know about; the food you don't. I attach a very great deal of importance to food, Mr. Palk."

Thomas Palk nodded.

"Them as work did ought to eat," he said.

"They did; and I'm often shocked to see farmers that don't think so. We keep a generous table here and a good cook likewise, for what my daughter don't know about a man's likes and dislikes in the matter of food ain't worth knowing. As to hours, what I say is that in private service, for that is how you must look at yourselves with me, hours are beside the question. Here's the work, and the work must be done; and some days it's done inside seven hours I shouldn't wonder, and some days it's not done inside eight. But only poor spirits be jealous of the clock and down tools just because of the time of day. For look at it. We ain't all built on the same pattern, and one man can do his sort of work an hour a day quicker than another, whether it is ploughing, or harvesting, or what not; and the other man can do something else an hour a day quicker than he can. So I'm for no silly rules, but just give and take to get the work done."

"A very self-respecting sort of way," said Maynard.

"Same with liquor," continued Joe. "On the subject of liquor, I take a man as I find him. I drink my beer and my nightcap also, and there's beer and cider going; and if in drouthy weather a man says, 'I want another half pint,' the barrel's there. I'm like that. But spirits, no. I might or I might not of an evening say to you, 'Have a spot from my bottle, Palk'; but there wouldn't be no rule."

"I'm teetotal myself," said Maynard, "but very fond of cold tea in working hours."

"Good. You'll never have less cold tea than you want, be sure."

"I be a thirsty man," confessed the elder. "Beer's my standby and I'm glad you grant it; but I only drink when I'm thirsty, though that's often. But no man ever saw me bosky-eyed, and none ever will."

"All to the good, Palk. So there it stands. And one more thing: till you know the ropes and my manners and customs, always come to me when in doubt. Your way may be a good way, but where there's two ways, I like mine, unless you can prove yours better. That's reasonable—eh?"

"Very reasonable," admitted Maynard.

"The horses are a middling lot and can be trusted to do their work. I'm buying another at the Ashburton Fair presently. My sheep—Devon long wools crossed with Scotch—are on the Moor, and we'll ride out Sunday and have a look at 'em. I'm buying pigs next week at a sale over to Holne. The cows are a very fine lot indeed. We sell our milk to Ashburton and Totnes."

He proceeded amiably until the cows were lowing at the farmyard gate. Then Maynard departed with Neddy Tutt to the milking, and Palk, who would begin to plough the stubble on the following day, started alone to walk round the yard and inspect the horses and machinery.

"A quiet couple of men," said Joe to his daughter, when they had gone; "but I like the quiet ones. They save their wind for their work."

"Mr. Maynard don't look particular strong," she said.

"Don't you go axing him after his health whatever you do. It often puts wrong ideas in their heads. I'm the only person in this house where health comes in, I should hope."

"You'd best turn 'em on to the fern so soon as you can," answered Susan. "Landlord was round again, when you were up over, seeing hounds meet at eight o'clock last week."

"What an early man he is!"

"Yes, and he said he'd hoped to see the work begun, because it frets him a lot that any land of his should go to rack. And he said that he'd have thought one like you, with a name for high farming, would have hated it as much as him."

"That's his cunning. The Honourable Childe's a very clever man, and I respect him for it. He knows me and I know him. The field will be as clean as a new pin before Christmas."

"You won't get your regular box of cigars from the man if it ain't, I expect."

"Oh yes, I shall. He's large-minded. He knows his luck. I like him very well, for he sees the amusing side of things."

"He weren't much amused last week."

Her father showed a trace of annoyance.

"What a damper you are, Soosie-Toosie. Was ever the like? You always be grim as a ghost under the ups and downs of life. But 'tis your poor mother in you. A luckier woman never walked, you might say; yet she was never hopeful—always on the look-out for the rainy day that never came."

"I think the new men be the sort to suit you."

"Nobody's easier to suit than me," he answered. "Let a labourer but do his duty, or even get in sight of his duty, and I'm his friend."

Susan reminded her father that a kinsman was coming in the evening.

"You know Johnny promised to look in on his way home from Ashburton and take supper along with us."

"So he did. The man's affairs hang fire by the look of it. When's he going to be married, I wonder?"

"Might ask him," answered Susan. "Not that he knows, I reckon. It's up to her."

When night came John Bamsey duly arrived and shared the last meal of the day.

His father and Mr. Stockman were cousins, or declared themselves to be so, and John always called Joseph 'Cousin Joe.'

He was one of the water-bailiffs on the river—a position he had held for six months. But he had already given a good account of himself, and his peculiarities of character were such that they made him a promising keeper. He was keen and resolute, with the merciless qualities of youth that knows itself in the right. He was also swift of foot and strong. A poacher, once seen, never escaped him. John entertained a cheerful conceit of himself, and his career was unsullied. He had fallen in love with a girl two years older than himself, and she had accepted him. And now, at twenty-two, John's only trouble was that Dinah Waycott would not name the day.

He was a fair, tall man, with a solid, broad face, small grey eyes, and an expression that did not change. He wore an old-fashioned pair of small whiskers and a tawny moustache.

He greeted the newcomers in friendship and talked about his work on the river. He was

frank and hearty, a great chatterbox without much self-consciousness.

"And when's the wedding going to be?" asked Mr. Stockman.

"Don't know; but it's about time I did; and I mean to know inside this month. Dinah must make up her mind, Cousin Joe. Wouldn't you say that was fair?"

"Certainly she should. Orphan Dinah took you very near a year ago, and the marriage ought to be next spring in my opinion."

"No doubt it will be," answered John; "but I will have something definite. Love-making is all right, but I want to be married and take the lodge at Holne Chase."

"The lodge Neddy Tutt's parents keep?" said Susan.

"Yes; and by the same token, Neddy, your mother expects you Sunday."

"I be coming," said Neddy Tutt, and John continued. "I'm lodging with 'em, but they're very wishful to be off, and they will be so soon as ever I'm spliced. The Honourable Childe wants me at the lodge, and I want to be there."

Susan, who had a mind so sensitive that she often suspected uneasiness in other minds where none existed, was reflecting now, dimly, that the newcomers would not find this subject very interesting. They sat stolidly and quietly listening and eating their supper. Occasionally Maynard spoke to Susan; Palk had not made a remark since he came to the meal.

Now, however, Joe relieved his daughter's care. He enjoyed exposition and, for the benefit of his new men, he explained a relationship somewhat complicated.

"We be talking in the air no doubt for your ears," he said. "But I hope you'll feel yourselves interested in my family before long, just as I shall be in your families, if you've got relations that you like to talk about. Me and this young man's father are cousins in a general way of speaking, and his father, by name Benjamin Bamsey, was married twice. First time he married the widow of Patrick Waycott, who was a footman at the Honourable Childe's, lord of Holne Manor, and she come to my cousin Benjamin with one baby daughter, Dinah by name. So the girl, now up home twenty-three, is just 'Orphan Dinah,' because her mother died of consumption a year after she married Mr. Bamsey. Then Benjamin wedded again—a maiden by the name of Faith West; and she's the present Mrs. Ben Bamsey, and this chap is her son. And now Johnny here be tokened to his foster-sister, Orphan Dinah, who, of course, ain't no relation of his. I hope I make myself clear."

"Nothing could be clearer," said Lawrence Maynard.

"What did the footman die of?" asked Palk slowly.

"Consumption, same as his wife. In fact the seeds was in the poor girl when Ben took her. But she done very well with him as long as she lived, and he's terrible fond of Dinah."

Palk abstracted himself. One could almost appreciate outward signs of the mental retreat into his shell. He became oblivious with a frowning forehead, committing this family situation to a memory where it would remain graven for ever.

John took up the talk.

"Father's too fond of Dinah for my peace in a way. You know father—how he dashes at a thing. The moment he heard from mother, who'd found out, that I was gone on Dinah, he swore as nothing would please him better. And he was on my side from the first. In fact if Dinah hadn't wanted me for myself, I believe father would have driven her to take me, for she'd do anything for him. She couldn't love a real father better. She dotes upon him."

"He can't spoil her, however. Nothing would spoil Dinah," said Susan.

"And now," continued John, "now that the time's in sight and changes have got to come, father begins to sing small at the thought of losing her. He seemed to have a sort of notion I'd live on at home for ever, and Dinah too."

Maynard spoke.

"I hope the young woman is strong," he said. "'Tis rather serious for both parents to have died so young."

"A very natural and thoughtful thing to say," declared Joe. "It shows you've got intellects, Maynard. But, thank God, the girl is sound every way; in fact, out of the common hearty and nice-looking too."

"A very bowerly maid," added Susan.

"If she's got a fault, she's too plain-spoken," continued Mr. Stockman. "I'm all for direct speech myself, and there's nothing like making your meaning clear. It saves time better than any invention. But Dinah—how can you put it? She's got such a naked way of talking. She's a bit startling at times, Dinah is."

"It ain't she says anything to shock you, when you come to think over it," argued Susan. "It's

just plain thinking and going to the root of the matter."

Maynard ventured a sentiment.

"If the young woman says just what she means, it's a very rare thing," he murmured.

"So it is, then," admitted Mr. Stockman. "Few do so—either because they don't want to, or else because they haven't got the words to fit their feelings. There's lots feel more than they're educated to put into speech. But though Dinah haven't got any more words than any other young ignorant creature, yet she's so inclined by nature to say what she means that she generally manages to do it."

"Can make herself bitter clear sometimes," Johnny assured them. He spoke apparently from experience and memory, and his cheerful face clouded a little.

"No lovers' quarrels, I hope," murmured Susan.

"Of course there are," chaffed Joe. "You that have missed the state, Soosie-Toosie, and don't know no more about love than a caterpillar, no doubt think that a lovers' quarrel be a very parlous thing. But it's no more parlous than the east wind in March—is it, Johnny? A frosty breeze may be very healthy and kill a lot of grubs and destroyers, if the ground be properly worked over and the frost can get into it."

Maynard laughed.

"I reckon that's true, Mr. Stockman," he said.

"What might you think, Mr. Palk?" asked Susan. She felt the heavy silence of Thomas, and knew not, as yet, that he often clothed himself in silence for his own comfort.

"Couldn't offer an opinion, miss," he replied.

"I be of the bachelor persuasion and never felt no feeling to be otherwise."

"You're a loser and a gainer, Thomas," said his new master genially. "You may lose the blessing of a good son, or daughter, and a valuable wife; and you gain also, because you might not have had those fine things. You might have had what's better than freedom; but on the other hand you might have had what's a long sight worse."

"And freedom's a very fine thing," added Maynard.

Mr. Stockman loved these questions. He proceeded to examine marriage in all its aspects, and left a general impression on the mind of the attentive Mr. Palk that the ideal of achievement was to have loved and lost, and be left with a faithful home-staying daughter: in fact, Mr. Stockman's own situation. He appeared to hold a brief for the widowed state as both dignified and convenient.

"All the same, father reckons you're the sort will marry again, Cousin Joe," Johnny told him. "He says that such a good-looking man as you, and so popular with the ladies, will surely take another some day, when you'm tired of sporting."

Mr. Stockman shook his head.

"That's like Benjamin—to judge by the outside and never sound the depths. And not a word against him, for a finer pattern of mind and one fuller of the milk of human kindness don't live; but let nobody fear any such adventure for me. Me and Soosie-Toosie will go our way, all in all to each other; and the less we have to trouble about ourselves, the more thought we can give to our neighbours."

Susan displayed her wan smile at these sentiments. She was in stark fact her father's slave, and John well knew it; but he made no comment. Mr. Stockman seldom said a word open to comment. It was his genius invariably to give the soft answer—from no moral conviction, but as a matter of policy. Life had taught him that friction was seldom worth the trouble; and he had an art to get his way rather by geniality of manner than force of character. He achieved his purpose, and that frequently a hard and selfish purpose; but such was his hearty humanity of approach that people for the most part found themselves conceding his wishes. He did not, however, hoodwink everybody. There were neighbours who openly declared that Joe was a humbug, always playing for his own hand, and better able so to do than many far less gracious and genial.

John Bamsey departed, and after he had gone the master of Falcon Farm praised him generously.

"A four-square, fine chap that," he said. "An example to the young fellows. A proper glutton for work. He'll be down on the river for hours to-night, to keep off they baggering salmon poachers. And he goes to church Sundays with his parents and always keeps his temper well in hand. A forceful chap—a little narrow in his opinions, I dare say; but that don't matter when his opinions are sound and on the side of morals and good order. And the larger charity will come in time. I can see you men are charitable-minded, for I'm a student of character and read people pretty clever, owing to my large experience. Have a spot out of my bottle to-night for luck. Then, I dare say, you won't be sorry to turn in.

We're early birds by night and early birds in the morning. I always say the hours before breakfast break the back of the day."

Maynard took no liquor, but drank a cup of tea with Susan, whose solitary dissipation was tea at all possible times. Thomas Palk accepted a glass of whisky and water.

Soon after ten all went to bed.

"Soosie-Toosie will call you at half after five," said Joseph, "and I like, in a general way, to hear Ned start with the milk cart to Ashburton before seven for the milk train. It's always a pain to me not to stir myself till breakfast. I lie awake and hunger for the hour; but lifelong rules have often got to be broke for failing health's sake in sight of seventy, as you'll find in your turn no doubt. I wish you good night, and if there's anything you lack, tell my daughter to-morrow. I hope we shall be good friends and a lot more than master and man pretty soon."

He shook hands with them both, and while Palk contented himself by saying "Good night, master," Maynard, who was moved by such comfortable words, echoed them and thanked Mr. Stockman for the manner of his reception.

CHAPTER IV

AT BUCKLAND-IN-THE-MOOR

LIKE BEEHIVES cluster the thatched roofs of Buckland, for the cottages are dwarfed by the lofty trees which soar above them. Oak and ash, pine and beech heave up hugely to their canopies upon the hill slope, and the grey roofs and whitewashed walls of the hamlet seem little more than a lodge of pygmies sequestered in the forest. The very undergrowth of laurel has assumed giant proportions and flings many a ponderous bough across the highway, where winds a road with mossy walls through the forest and the village.

The cottage coverings were old and sombre of tone; but on this September day sunshine soaked through the interlacing boughs and brought light to the low-browed windows, to the fuchsias and purple daisies in the gardens. It flashed a ruby on the rays of Virginian creepers, that sometimes clothed a wall, and brightened the white faces of the little dwellings to pale gold.

Above stretched the woods, legion upon legion, their receding intricacies of branch and bough broken by many thousand trunks. Beneath, again the woods receded over steep acclivities to the river valley.

Though the houses were few and small, great distinction marked them. They held themselves as though conscious of their setting, and worthy of it. They fitted into the large and elaborate moulding of the hillside, and by their human significance completed a vision that had been less without them. There was a quality of massive permanence in the scene, imparted by the gigantic slope of the hill whereon it was set. Earth fell evenly, serenely from its crown on the naked Beacon above, down and down to the uttermost depths of the river valley and the cincture of silver Dart winding through the midst of it.

At a point where the road fell and climbed again through the scattered dwellings there stood two cottages under the trees together. They adjoined, and one was fair to see—well-kept and prosperous, with a tidy scrap of garden before it and a little cabbage patch behind. The straw of the roof was trimly cut and looped heavily over the dormer-windows, while above, on a brick stack, four slates were set instead of a chimney-pot. But the neighbour cottage presented a forlorn appearance. It was empty; its thatch was scabbed and crusted with weeds and blobs of moss; at one place it had fallen in and the wooden ribs of the roof protruded. A mat of neglected ivy covered the face of the cot and thrust through broken windows into the little chambers. Damp and decay marked all, and its evil fame seemed reflected in its gloomy exterior. For the house was haunted, and since Mrs. Benjamin Bamsey had seen a 'wishtness' peering through the parlour window on two successive evenings after the death of the last tenant, none could be found

to occupy this house, though dwellings at Buckland-in-the-Moor were far to seek.

Now a man appeared in the road from the direction of the church. He was of an aspect somewhat remarkable, and he came from Lower Town, a hamlet sunk in the Vale to the west. Arthur Chaffe combined many trades, as a carpenter in a small village is apt to do. He attended to the needs of a scattered community, and boasted that what could be made of wood, from a coffin to a cider cask, lay in his power. And beyond the varied and ceaseless needs of his occupation he found time for thought, and indeed claimed to be a man above the average of intelligence.

He was eight-and-fifty, and so spare that the bones of his face gave it expression. Upon them a dull yellowish skin was tightly drawn. He was growing bald, and shaved his upper lip and cheeks, but wore a thin grey beard. He had a flat nose, and his long legs suggested an aquatic bird, while his countenance resembled a goat. His expression was both amiable and animated, and he could laugh heartily. Mr. Chaffe's activities were centripetal and his orbit limited. It embraced Lower Town and Buckland, and occasionally curved to Holne and outlying farms; but he was a primitive, and had seldom stirred out of a ten-mile radius. He employed three men, and himself worked from morning to night.

He left the high road now, approached the pair of cottages, and knocked at the door of the respectable dwelling.

Melinda Honeysett it was who appeared and expressed pleasure.

"So you've come then, Mr. Chaffe. What a man of your word you are!"

"I hope so, Mrs. Honeysett. And very pleased to do anything for you and your father."

"Come in and sit down for five minutes. 'Tis a climb from Lower Town."

"We thin blades have the pull of the beefy ones in this country."

"Will you have a drink and a piece of my seedy cake?"

"Gladly. How's the Governor?"

"Pretty middling for him. You must see him afore you go. You're one of his pets."

"I'm none so sure of that. I've been busier than ever this summer. I surprise myself sometimes what I get into twenty-four hours."

"I dare say you do."

Melinda brought the wayfarer refreshment. They sat in a pleasant kitchen, whose walls were washed a pale ochre, making harmony with various brass and copper articles upon the mantel shelf and dresser. The floor was of stone, and in the alcove of the window some scarlet geraniums thrived. They spoke of neighbours, and Mr. Chaffe asked a question.

"I hear from Ben Bamsey that his cousin have got two new men at Falcon Farm, and foreigners both."

"So they are. One's youngish, t'other's middle-aged; and Joe says they promise to be treasures."

"How soft that chap do always fall," mused the carpenter.

"Because he's got the wit to choose where he will fall," answered Mrs. Honeysett. "Joe Stockman has gifts. He's a master of the soft answer."

"Because he knows it pays."

"Well, a very good reason."

"His cleverness and charity come out of his head, not his heart. He's the sort may cast his crumbs on the waters, but never unless he sees the promise of a loaf returning."

"You don't like him."

"I wouldn't say I didn't like him. As a man of intellects myself I value brains. He's a clever man."

"He gets round one, you know. There's a great power in him to say the word to a woman he always knows will please her. I properly like him some days; then other days he drives me frantic."

The gruff voice of Mrs. Honeysett's father intruded upon them. It came from a little chamber which opened out of the kitchen and had been converted into his bedroom. His lower limbs were paralysed, but he had a vehicle which he moved by handles, and could thus steer himself about the ground floor of his home.

"I hear Arthur Chaffe," rumbled the voice. "I'll see you, Arthur, afore you go, and larn if you've got more sense than when you was here last."

A gurgle of laughter followed this remark, and the visitor echoed it.

"Don't you charge too much for my new gate, then—sense or no sense."

"Whoever heard tell of me charging too much for anything, Enoch?"

"Widow Snow did, when you buried her husband."

Again the slow heavy laughter followed; but Mr. Chaffe did not laugh. He shook his head. Then he rose and suggested inspecting the old gate and making measurements for the new one.

That matter settled and the price determined, Arthur Chaffe returned to the cottage and found that Mr. Withycombe had travelled in upon his little trolley and lifted himself to a large, dog-eared chair beside the hearth.

He was a heavy man with a big fresh face that had been exceedingly handsome in his prime, but was now a little bloated and discoloured, since fate had ended for the old sportsman his hard and active existence. He had hunted the Dart Vale Foxhounds for thirty years; then, maimed in the back by a fall, for five years he had occupied the position of indoor servant to a master who was deeply attached to him. Finally had come a stroke, as the result of the old injury, and Enoch was forced to retire. He had now reached the age of sixty-six and was a widower with two sons and one daughter. One boy was in the Royal Navy, the other lived at home and worked in the woods.

Mr. Withycombe had grey eyes, a Roman nose, and cheeks of a ruddy complexion. He wore whiskers, but shaved his mouth and chin. He was a laughing philosopher, admired for his patience and unfailing good temper, but distrusted, because he permitted himself opinions that did not conform to the community in which he dwelt. These were suspected to be the result of his physical misfortunes; in reality they were but the effect of his environment. An admiration amounting to passion existed in the large heart of Mr. Withycombe for his former master, and during those years when he worked under his roof, the old fox-hunter had learned educated views on various subjects and modified his own to match them. The Honourable Ernest Childe,

of Holne Chase, a lord of three manors, could neither do nor think wrong in Enoch's opinion. He was the paragon, and the more nearly did his fellow creatures take their colour from such a man and such a mind the better it must be for all—so Mr. Withycombe declared.

Mr. Chaffe shook the heavy and soft hand that Enoch extended to him.

"And how's yourself?" he asked.

"Half dead, half alive, Arthur. But the half that matters most is alive."

"And be wise enough to feel patience for the weaker members."

"Now it do," admitted Enoch. "But I won't pretend. When this blow first fell upon me and I knew that my legs would be less use in the world than rotten wood, then I cursed God. However, that's past. I've got my wits, and now, along of these spectacles, I can read comfortable again."

He pointed to a little shelf within reach of his hand where stood various works.

"I could wish you'd read some books of mine, Enoch," said Arthur Chaffe.

"So I will, then—didn't know you'd got any books."

"Oh yes, I have—Sunday reading."

"You chaps that limit yourselves to 'Sunday reading' get narrow-minded," declared Withycombe. "But you'd find there's a lot of very fine books just so good on Sunday as Monday. *The Rights of Man*, for example. There's a proper book, and it don't interfere with the rights of God for a moment."

"Mr. Chaffe be going to ax seventeen and six for the gate and five shillings for the hinges and lachet," said Melinda.

"A very fair price and I shan't quarrel with it."

He handed his tobacco pouch to the visitor. It was covered with otter skin now grown shabby.

Arthur filled his pipe.

"We stand for different things, you and me," he said, "yet, thank God, agree in the virtues. Duty's duty, and a man that's honest with himself can't miss it."

"Oh yes, he can, Arthur. There's plenty that be honest enough and don't want to shirk, yet miss the road."

"Because they won't read the sign-posts."

"Now stop!" commanded Melinda. "Talk about something interesting. How's Orphan Dinah? Haven't seen her for a month."

"She's very well. Passed the time of day yesterday. Been helping in the harvest. Ben Bamsey have had the best wheat he remembers."

"When's the wedding? You'll know if anybody does—Ben's right hand as you be."

"No, no; his wife's his right hand. But we'm like brothers, I grant. Now that the date is only waiting for Dinah, Ben begins to feel what her going will be. No doubt we shall hear soon. Faith Bamsey's at Dinah about it. She reckons it's not fair to Johnny to keep him on the hooks longer."

"More it is."

"Well, I dare say you're right, Mrs. Honeysett. Dinah's the sort that loves liberty; but the maids have got to come to it. She will go into matrimony fearless."

"Fearless enough," said Enoch. "If she'd been born in a different station of life, how that creature would have rode to hounds!"

"She's more interesting than most young

things in my opinion, because there's rather more to her," explained Mr. Chaffe. "She'll surprise you more than many grown-ups."

"It's something that a man who knows human nature so well as you should be surprised, Arthur," said the old hunter.

The other laughed at a recollection.

"You're pulling my leg, I reckon—same as that sly publican, Andrew Caunter, at the Seven Stars. 'Ah!' he said to me, 'you're a marvel, Chaffe; you get every man and woman's measure to an inch!' I told him I wasn't so clever as all that, because none but God knows all there is to know; but he swore he was right—and proved it by reminding me I'm an undertaker!"

Enoch laughed.

"Funny word 'undertaker.' A good chap is Andrew Caunter. Many a flip of sloe-gin I've had at his door when hounds met that way. He'd bring it out himself, just for the pleasure of 'good morning.'"

"You often hear the horn from here?"

"I heard it yesterday, and I finger my own now and again."

He looked up to where his hunting horn hung from a nail above the mantel shelf.

"Is it true old Sparrow be gone to the work-house?" asked Melinda, who loved facts concerning fellow creatures and reduced conversation to personalities when she could.

"It is true," answered Chaffe.

"A sparrow as fell to the ground uncounted, then," said Enoch.

"And what's this a little bird has whispered to me about Jane Bamsey?" continued Melinda.

"Can't say till I know the particulars."

"That my brother Jerry be after her."

"Haven't heard nothing. But you ought to know."

"I've guessed it. Jerry's moonstruck and always looking that way."

"I hope it ain't true," said Enoch. "I don't much care for that maiden. She's spoiled, and she's shifty. She came to see us with her mother. Hard-hearted."

"She's no more than a kitten yet, father."

"Yes; but the sort of kitten that grows into a cat devilish quick. I wouldn't wish it for my Jerry's sake. He's a man likely to be under the thumb of his wife, so I'd hope a different sort for him."

"Jane's too young for my brother," declared Melinda. "He's over thirty and she's but eighteen or so. Besides, when Dinah marries John and goes, then Jane will have to turn to and be more to her mother. She's terrible lazy."

Mr. Chaffe shook his head.

"They don't know what it will mean to that house when Dinah leaves it."

"Her stepfather does," answered Enoch's daughter. "Dinah's the apple of his eye. But Mrs. Bamsey's looking forward to it on the quiet."

"It's natural in a way. She's always been a thought jealous of her husband's great love for Orphan Dinah. And so has Jane. She'll be glad enough when Dinah's away. And it's up to her, as you say, to fill the gap."

"Which she's not built to do," prophesied Mr. Withycombe.

They chatted a little longer and then, promising the new gate in a fortnight, Arthur Chaffe went on his way.

CHAPTER V

THE ACCIDENT

THOUGH LAWRENCE MAYNARD was a man of intelligence far deeper than Thomas Palk, yet the latter began to arrive at a juster conclusion concerning his new life and his new master.

Maynard had both seen and felt far more than Palk, yet, in the matter of their present environment, Thomas it was who divined the situation correctly. And this he did, inspired by that most acute of prompters, self-interest; while precisely in this particular Lawrence Maynard was indifferent. His own life, by the accident of circumstance, concerned him but little. Chance had altered the original plan and scope so largely that he was now become impassive, and so emptied of his old appetite for living that he did not at present trouble himself to use the good brains in his head. The very work he had chosen to do was not such work as he might have done. It was less than the work he once did; but it contented him now. Yet his activities of mind were not wholly sunk to the level of his occupation. Sometimes he occupied himself with abstract speculations involving fate and conduct, but not implicating humanity and character.

So he took people at their own valuation, from

indifference rather than goodwill. He liked Mr. Stockman and appreciated his benevolence, without any attempt to examine beneath the smiling and genial surface that Joe invariably presented. He had proved exceedingly kind, and even considerate. He had, in fact, though he knew it not, wakened certain sentiments in the younger man's heart, and, as a result of this, while their acquaintance was still of the shortest, moved by a very rare emotion, Maynard challenged his master's friendship by the channel of confidence. Nor did it appear that he had erred. The farmer proved exceedingly understanding. Indeed, he exhibited larger sympathies than he was in reality capable of feeling, for Mr. Stockman had a genius for suggesting that the individual who at any time approached him could count upon his entire and single-hearted attention—nay, his devotion.

Thus, after a month at Falcon Farm, Lawrence Maynard felt something like enthusiasm for the master, while Thomas Palk failed of such high emotion. Not that Thomas had anything to quarrel about actively; but weighing Joe's words against his deeds, he had slowly, almost solemnly, come to the conclusion that there was a disparity. He voiced his opinion on a day when he and Lawrence were working together on the great fern slopes under the Beacon. There, some weeks before, the bracken had been mown down with scythes, and now the harvest was dry and ready to be stacked for winter litter. They made bales of the fern and loaded on a haycart.

"The man tighteneth," said Palk. "I don't say it in no unkind spirit; but it ain't working out exactly same as he said it was going to.

I wouldn't say he was trying to come it over me, or anything like that; but he's a masterpiece for getting every ounce out of you."

"Can't say he asks anything out of reason."

"No, no—more I do; but I warn you. He edges in the work that crafty—here a job and there a job—and such a scorn of regular hours. 'Tis all very well to say when our work's done we can stop, no matter what the hour is; but when is our work done? Never, till 'tis too dark to do it any longer."

Maynard laughed.

"I find him a very understanding man, and friendly."

"So do I, so do I; but I mark the plan he goes on. I won't say it's not a very good plan for a farmer. Feeds well and pays well and treats well; but, behind all that, will have a little more than his money's worth out of man and beast."

"Can't say I've found him grasping."

"Then I hope to God I'm wrong and 'tis my fancy. I'm satisfied if you are; and if his daughter don't feel no call to be uneasy, why for should us?"

"For my part I like work," declared Lawrence. "I may not have been so keen once; but there's very little to my life but work. I've got used to looking at work as about the only thing in the world."

"The first thing, not the only thing," answered Thomas. "In the case of many people, there's families and the rising generation. We'm bachelors and ban't troubled in that way; but I like to get away from work and just do nothing—mind and body—for a good hour sometimes."

Palk started with a full cart presently, while Maynard began to collect fresh masses of the dry fern and bind it. He found himself content at Falcon Farm. He was settling down, and liked the place and the people. He did not observe, or attempt to observe, anything beneath the surface of his new neighbours; but they proved friendly and satisfied him well. He liked John Bamsey; he liked Melinda Honeysett, and had visited her father and found a spirit who promised to throw light on some of his own problems.

Now he was to meet yet another from his new circle. He worked two hundred yards above the road that ran slantwise across the hillside to Buckland; and from below him now, whence the sound of a trotting horse's footfall ascended, he heard a sudden harsh noise which spoke of an accident. Silence followed. The horse had evidently come down. Maynard dropped his hay fork, tightened his leather belt, and descended swiftly to the hedge. Looking over into the deep lane below he saw a pony on the ground, the shaft of a light market-cart broken, and a girl, with her hat crushed, her hair fallen and a bloody face, loosening the harness.

She was a brown young woman with a pair of dark grey eyes, and a countenance that preserved a cheerful expression despite her troubles. She wore a tweed skirt and a white flannel bodice, upon which the blood from her face had already dropped. She was kneeling and in some danger of the struggling pony's hoofs.

"Stand clear!" shouted Lawrence. Then he jumped the sheer eight feet of the wall, falling for his own comfort on the mass of beech leaves

that filled the water-table below. The girl rose. She was filled with concern for the pony.

"Poor chap; he's been down before. How's his knees? All my fault. I got thinking and forgot the road was slippery."

"You're badly cut, I'm thinking."

"It's nothing much. I fell on top of him when he came down. 'Twas a buckle done it, I expect."

The man freed the pony and pulled back the trap. The animal had not hurt itself, but was frightened.

Its driver directed Lawrence.

"Thank you, I'm sure. That comes of wool-gathering when you ought to be minding your business. Serve me right. I'll take the pony—he knows me. D'you think you could pull the trap so far as Buckland, or shall I send for it? I can put it up there in a shed and send to Lower Town for a new shaft."

"I'll fetch it along. Is your face done bleeding?"

"Very near. You'll be Mr. Lawrence Maynard, I suppose?"

"So I am, then. How d'you know it?"

"Guessed it. I'm Dinah Waycott. I expect my young man has told you about me. 'Orphan Dinah' they call me. I'm tokened to John Bamsey, the water-keeper, my foster-father's son."

He nodded.

"I've heard tell about you. John Bamsey often drops in at Falcon Farm."

He pulled the trap along, and she walked beside him leading the pony. She spoke kind words to the creature, apologised to it, and told it to cheer up.

Maynard observed her and quickly perceived

the outspoken quality that had occasioned argument.

"I was wishful to see you, because Johnny likes you. But he's not much of a hand at sizing up people. Perhaps if he was, he wouldn't be so silly fond of me," she said.

This was no challenge, but merely the utterance of her opinion. Nothing of the coquette appeared in Dinah. She had received his succour with gratitude, but expressed no dismay at the poor figure she cut on their meeting.

"He's a good chap," he answered, "and mighty fond of you, miss."

Thus unconsciously he fell into her own direct way of speech. He did not feel that he was talking to a stranger; and that not because he had already heard so much about her, but because Dinah created an atmosphere of directness between herself and all men and women. She recognised no barriers until the other side raised them. There was a goodwill about her that never hid itself. She was like a wild thing that has not yet learned to distrust man.

"Are you a chap with a pretty good judgment of your fellow creatures?" she asked. "You've got a thoughtful sort of face as if you might be."

He smiled and looked at her.

"Your fellow creatures make you thoughtful," he answered.

"Don't they? Never you said a truer word! Your life all depends upon the people in it, seemingly."

"They make or mar it most times."

"Yes, they're the only difficult thing about it."

"If we could live it all to ourselves, it might be easy enough."

"So I think when I look at a squirrel. But I dare say, if he could talk, he'd tell us the other squirrels was a nuisance, and cadged his food and worried him."

"I dare say he would."

"I'm one of the lucky ones," she said.

"Ah!"

"Yes. If I put my finger on a trouble, I find it one of my own making."

"Like to-day?"

"This don't amount to a trouble—just an accident with nobody the worse."

"You might have broke your neck, however."

"But I didn't, nor yet the pony's knees—my luck."

"You may have marked your cheek for life."

"And what does that matter? Suppose I'd knocked half my teeth down my throat: that would have been something to worrit about."

"You're the hopeful sort. Perhaps that's your best luck—that you're built to take a bright view, miss."

"Perhaps it is. Aren't you?"

"We may be built to one pattern and then life come along and unbuild us."

"I wouldn't let life unbuild me."

He did not answer, and presently she asked him a question.

"What d'you think of my Johnny, Mr. Maynard?"

"Hardly know him well enough to say."

"You know him as well as he knows you—better, because he will be talking more than thinking, same as me. He's took to you and sees you've got a brain, but says you're rather glum for a young man."

"Does he?"

"Why? People ain't glum for nought."

"Oh yes, they are—often for less than nought. It ain't life, it's nature makes many downcast. You see chaps, chin-deep in trouble, always ready to laugh with the loudest."

"So you do, then."

"And others—prosperous men, with nothing to grizzle about—always care-foundered and fretty."

"You'd say you was glum by nature, then?"

"I wouldn't say I was glum—you've only got John Bamsey's word for it. Miss Stockman wouldn't tell you I was glum."

"She likes you very much. She told me so when she was over to my home last week. Soosie-Toosie's a woman quick to welcome a bit of luck, because she don't get much, and she likes you, and Mr. Palk also."

"I'm glad she does."

"And what d'you think of Johnny?"

"A very good chap, I'm sure. Rather excitable, perhaps."

"He is, you might say, a thought unreasonable sometimes."

"Never where you are concerned, I'm sure."

"He's got the loveliest hair ever I saw on a man."

"Fine curly hair, sure enough."

"Temper always goes with that fashioned hair. I've noticed it."

"I'm sure his temper is good most times."

"He's sulky if he's crossed."

"He's young. Perhaps he hasn't been crossed often."

"Never—never once in his life—until now."

But he's a thought vexed because I won't name the day."

"Who shall blame him?"

"Nobody. I'm sure I don't."

"I expect you will name it pretty soon, miss?"

"I expect so. How d'you like Cousin Joe?"

"Mr. Stockman? Very much indeed."

"He's cruel lazy; but what does that matter? Where d'you come from, if I may ask?"

"Somerset."

They had reached Buckland, and Dinah hitched her pony to the hedge, opened a gate, and directed Lawrence to wheel the trap into a byre close at hand.

"I'll tell Mr. Budge what's happened and he'll let father's cart bide there for the minute. Then I'll take the pony and my parcels home."

"You're all right?"

"Never righter. And thank you, I'm sure. I won't forget it; and if ever I can do you a good turn, I will."

"Very pleased to meet you, miss. And you see doctor for that cut. 'Tis a pretty deep gash and did ought to be tended."

"Foster-father'll put me right. And if you're in a mind to come over one day to Sunday dinner, I hope you will. He'll be wishful to thank you."

"No need at all. But I'll come some time, since you're so kind as to offer."

"Mind you do, then. I want for you to."

They parted, and Lawrence returned to his work in the fern. He came back as swiftly as he might, but an hour was past during which he had been absent. He found Thomas Palk and his master. Joe was handling Lawrence's fork

and assisting Thomas to fill the haycart. As Maynard entered a gate beneath and ascended to the fern patch, Mr. Stockman laboriously lifted a mass of litter up to Thomas on the cart. Then he heaved a heavy sigh, dropped the fork, and rubbed his side.

He spoke to Lawrence as he arrived.

"Here's the man! Well, Lawrence, you've been taking the air, I see; but I can't help feeling, somehow, that it's a thought ill-convenient in the midst of a busy working morning, with the dry litter crying to be stored, that you should make holiday. I've filled the breach, of course, as my custom is."

"There was a good reason, master."

"Thank God! I told Palk I hoped there was, or I should have felt a lot cast down in my mind and wondered how I'd come to misread you."

The young man explained, and Stockman was instantly mollified.

"Enough said. You could do no less. A female in trouble is a very good excuse for leaving your duty. In fact a female in trouble is everybody's duty."

The silent man in the cart made a note of this sentiment, while Joe continued.

"To think that Orphan Dinah should let the pony down—such a very wide-awake young thing as her! Dreaming about Johnny, no doubt. And hurt, you say?"

"Miss had got a bad cut across her face; but she made nothing of it."

"A nice maid. Too large-minded for safety, some might think; but she ain't. Hope she's not marked. Not that her face is her fortune by any means; her fortune's in her heart, for by the

grace of God her heart is gold. I like a bit hidden in a woman myself—for the pleasure of bringing it to light.”

“She says what she means, master.”

“She does, and what’s a lot rarer even than that, she knows what she means. Many in my experience find the mere fact of being alive such a puzzle to them that they ain’t clear about anything. They go through their days like a man who’ve had just one drop too much.”

“Life be a drop too much for some people,” said Lawrence.

“It is. Keep working, keep working. An hour lost is an hour lost, even though you’d knocked off to help the Queen of England. What a far-reaching thing a catastrophe may be! Orphan Dinah gets mooning and lets down her pony. Then you go to the rescue, and drop your work and make a gap in the orderly scheme of things in general. Then I come along and, forgetting my age and infirmity, rush in to fill the gap. That’s the way how things be always happening. Often nobody to blame, you understand, but always somebody to pay. I may be in bed to-morrow.”

“The fern will be home to-night before milking.”

“That’s a brave speech, such as I should have spoken at your age,” said Joe. “Now I must limp back afore I’m stiff, and see what my daughter can do for me.”

He left them, going slowly, and relying much upon his stick. Then, when he was out of ear-shot, Thomas spoke.

“What d’you think of that?” he asked.

“Did he do much work?”

"Pitched three forks of fern, or it might be four—not a darned one more."

"He's a clever old man, however."

"I never said he weren't," answered Palk.

"He's the cleverest old man ever I saw."

"We'll get the fern in anyway."

Mr. Stockman had sat down two hundred yards from them by the grassy track to the farm.

"He's waiting for me to give him a lift home," said Thomas.

CHAPTER VI

ON HAZEL TOR

JOHN BAMSEY was a youth who had not yet felt the edge of life. His success had made him vain. He was patronising in his attitude to his own generation, and therefore unpopular with it; but he set down a lack of friendship to natural envy at his good fortune and cheerful prospects. He liked his work and did it well. The fish were under his protection, and no ruth obscured his fidelity to them. Into his life had come love, and since the course thereof ran smoothly, this experience had chimed with the rest and combined, by its easy issue, to retard any impact of reality and still leave John in a state of ignorance concerning those factors of opposition and tribulation which are a part of the most prosperous existence.

Dinah accepted him, after a lengthy period of consideration, and she was affectionate if not loverly. He never stayed to examine the foundation of her compact, nor could he be blamed, for he had no reason to suppose that she had said 'yes' from mixed motives. A girl so direct, definite, and clear-sighted as Dinah seemed unlikely to be in two minds about anything, and John, knowing his own hearty passion and ardent

emotions, doubted not that she echoed them. Yet there went more to the match than that, and others perceived it, though he did not. Dinah's position was peculiar, and in truth love for another than John had gone largely—more largely than she guessed herself—to decide her. There was little sex impulse in her—otherwise her congenital frankness with man and woman alike had been modified by it. But she could love, for a rare sense of gratitude belonged to her, and the height and depth of her vital affections belonged to her foster-father, Benjamin Bamsey. Him she did love, as dearly as child ever loved a parent, and it was the knowledge that such a match would much delight him that had decided Dinah and put a term to her doubts. But she had become betrothed on grounds inadequate, and now was beginning, as yet but dimly, to perceive it. Her disquiets did not take any shape that John could quarrel with, for she had not revealed them. She was honestly fond of him, and if she did not respond to his ardour with such outward signs of affection as he might have desired, his own inexperience in that matter prevented any uneasy suspicion on his part. He knew not the truth of woman's re-action, nor missed the outward signs that he might have reasonably expected.

The beginning of difficulty very gradually rose between them, and since they had never quarrelled in their lives, for all John's temper and Dinah's frankness, the difference now bred in a late autumn day gave both material for grave thought.

They met by appointment, strolled in the woods, then climbed through plantations of

sweet-smelling spruce till they reached Hazel Tor, piled on a little spur of the hillside under Buckland Beacon. Here the granite heaved in immense boulders that broke the sweep of the hill and formed a resting-place for the eye between the summit of the Beacon and the surface of the river winding in the lap of the Vale beneath.

The glories of the fall were at an end, and on an afternoon when the wind was still and the sky grey and near, pressing down on the naked tree-tops, Dinah, sitting here with her sweet-heart, chatted amiably enough. The cicatrix on her cheek was still red, but the wound had cleanly healed and promised to leave no scar.

Johnny, however, was doubtful.

"I won't say you won't be marked now."

"If kissing could make me safe, I should be."

"I wish you'd give me something to kiss you for; and that's the name of the day next Spring we're to wed."

"Isn't it enough if we say next Spring?"

"Quite enough, if you mean next Spring. I can't help wondering sometimes why you don't speak."

"You're not the only one that wonders, for that matter."

"Of course I'm not. Cousin Joe wonders every time I see him, and father wonders, and mother does more than wonder."

"I never thought it would be so difficult when the time came."

"So you grant that the time has come—that's something."

"I do grant it. I dare say a man doesn't realise what a thing it is for a girl to lose her liberty like this."

He was irritable.

"If you think what you call liberty at the farm is better than living with me in your own house, you must be a fool, Dinah."

"No," she declared. "I'm right. Home along with foster-father must be a much freer sort of life than home with you."

"You are a cold-blooded little devil sometimes," he said. "What's freedom, or slavery, or any other mortal thing got to do with a man and woman if they love one another? You don't hear me saying I shall lose my bachelor liberty."

"No, because you won't," answered Dinah. "I know you love me very dear, and I love you very dear; but marrying a woman don't turn a man's life upside down if he's a strong man. He goes on with his life, and the woman comes into it as an addition, and takes her place, and if all goes well, so much the better, and if all don't, then so much the worse for the woman. A man's not going to let a woman bitch up his ways if he's strong. But a woman's different. Marriage for her be the beginning of a new life. She can't take anything of the old life into it except her character. Marriage is being born again for a woman."

"Well, what about it? If you know so much, you ought to know more. Granted it don't always pan out well, and granted I'm a sort of man that wouldn't be turned to the right or left, are you a sort of woman that would be like to try and turn me? If you'd been such a she as that, should I have falled in love with you, or would you have falled in love with me? And as we've grown up side by side, our characters were laid

bare to each other from the time we could notice such things."

"That's the very matter in my mind. Do we know one another so well as we think we do? And isn't the very fact that we've grown up under the same roof a reason why we don't know each other so well as we might?"

"You're always for turning a thing inside out, my words included. Of course we know each other to the bottom of our natures; and so our marriage can't fail to be a good one. And knowing that, 'tis pure cussedness in you to argue different."

"You can be too near a thing to see it," she said. "I don't say we don't understand each other, John; but look at it without feeling—just as an interesting question, same as I do. Just ask yourself, if we're all you say, how it comes about that, despite such a lot of reasons, I hang back from naming the date. You say you want to know why. Well, so do I. What makes me refuse to name it? It's interesting, and it's no good merely being cross about it. I don't want to fix the date. I don't feel no call to do it."

"Then you ought."

"That's what I'm saying."

"And since you're well used to doing what you ought, it's about time you let your duty master you."

"Granted. I allow all that. What I want to know is why I'm not so keen to name the day and get to the day as you are?"

"Along of this silly fooling about losing your liberty. As if a married woman wasn't a lot freer than a single one."

"Oh no, she isn't. The single ones was never

so free as now. They can do scores of things no married woman would be suffered to do for a moment. That's because mothers and fathers care a lot less about what happens to their daughters than husbands care what happens to their wives. There's few real parents nowadays be what your father is to me."

"If you feel you owe him such a lot, why don't you do what he wants you to do and fix the day?"

She did not answer, knowing well that old Mr. Bamsey, at the bottom of his heart, little liked to dwell on her departure. And she knew more: she was aware that John's father himself had become doubtful. But the deed was done, and Dinah appreciated the justice of her sweetheart's demands.

They talked, and he grew angry.

"Blessed if you know what love is despite all your fine talk. A little more of it, and I shall begin to think you're off the bargain."

For answer she put her arms round his neck and kissed him.

"It's all very well; but you leave me guessing too often: and I'm not the sort that care to be left guessing. From a man I always get a plain answer, and I never leave him till I have. I hang on like a dog, and, turn or twist as they may, they know they've got to come to it. But you—it's rather late in the day to begin all over again and ask you if you really love me, or not. It's putting a pretty big slight upon me."

The girl made no very genuine attempt to turn away wrath. She was in a wilful and wayward mood—a thing uncommon with her; yet such a mood was capable of being provoked by Johnny oftener than most people.

"I love your hair," she said, stroking it.

He shook his head and put on his cap.

"You're not playing the game, and you know you're not. It's outside your character to do this—weak—feeble—mischievous. I begin to ask myself questions about it."

She changed her manner and, from being idle and playful, gave him her undivided attention. He had said something that rather pleased her when he hinted that his own feelings might grow modified; but she knew well enough that such a remark ought not to have pleased her and was certainly not uttered to do so.

"There's a screw loose somewhere, Johnny," she said.

"Where, then? God's my judge I didn't know there was a screw loose, and it's pretty ugly news, I can tell you."

"Oh, Johnny, don't you feel it?"

"No, I do not. And if I don't, then it's up to you to explain, not me."

"I don't know enough yet," she answered. "I'm not going to flounder into it and make trouble that can never be unmade again. I'll wait till I see a bit clearer, John."

"Don't you see that instead of being yourself, Dinah—famed for thinking straight and saying what you mean—you're behaving like any stupid giglet wench, not worth her keep to anybody?"

"Yes; and that's why a screw's loose."

"Well, if you know it, get it right."

"I must and will, John."

"You certainly must. If I was the fast-and-loose sort, or if I'd ever done anything to make you look back in doubt, then it would be different;

but this I will swear, that no man have been a better or truer lover."

"You're all right, and you've every reason to be pleased with yourself, Johnny. You're a wonder. But it's me. I'll work at myself. I'll thresh it out and try to find where I'm wrong; and if you can help me, I'll tell you. I'd sooner make anybody unhappy before you."

"Leave it, then," he said, "and get it off your mind so quick as you can."

They talked about other things, and John was in a better temper when presently the dusk fell and the lovers, leaving Hazel Tor, passed through a clearing, and presently climbed again to Falcon Farm, where they were to drink tea with Susan and her father.

Soosie-Toosie had a heavy cold in her head and appeared more unsightly than usual. Her large frame shook with her sneezes, and Joe feared that he would be the next to suffer.

"A cold be nought to her—here to-day and gone to-morrow; but if I get 'em they run down the tubes and lay me by for weeks," he said.

"Never seen you look better, Cousin Joe," declared John. "You be always at your fighting best when the woodcock comes back, so father says."

"He will have his bit of fun. There's only one thing wrong about your dear good father, Johnny; and that is he ain't a sportsman. With a place in his heart for sport, I do believe Ben Bamsey would have been a perfect human."

"He is perfect," said Dinah, "and I've often told him so."

"He'd never believe it if you did," said Susan; "he's much too good a man to think he's good."

"As to that," answered Joe, "it's false modesty to pretend you'm not good, when you know you are. If Soosie-Toosie said she weren't as good as gold, who'd believe her?"

"'Tis easy to be good if you're so busy as Soosie-Toosie and Johnny and a few more," answered Dinah; "but how can you be so amazing good with nothing on your hands, Cousin Joe?"

"Nothing on my hands? You bad girl! Little you know. You ax Susan if I've got nothing on my hands, or Thomas here."

Lawrence Maynard was absent, but Mr. Palk took tea with the rest. He had not so far spoken.

"You'm the head of the house," he said.

"And if my hand have lost its cunning, my head have not—eh, Thomas?"

"It have not," admitted Thomas.

"Father makes his head help his heels, don't you, father?" asked Soosie-Toosie, following her question with an explosion.

"I should hope so; and do, for God's love, go out in the scullery when you feel a sneeze coming, there's a dear! You be scattering the evil germs so thick as starlings."

"I'm just going," she said; "they'll be done their tea in a minute; then I'll gather the things and get away for the wash-up."

Dinah soon departed to help the sufferer; then Joe smoked and bade the others do the like.

"'Twill lay Soosie's germs," he said.

They discussed Maynard, who had gone to see some cows for a neighbour.

"What he don't know about 'em ain't worth knowing," said Mr. Stockman.

"Is he growing a bit more cheerful?"

"If he's not cheerful, there's a reason for it. But he's very sensible, with a head rather old for his shoulders—eh, Thomas?"

"Made of sense, I reckon."

"And what is his opinion of me, Thomas, if I may ask?"

Mr. Palk did not reply immediately, though there was no need to hesitate. But he never replied immediately to any question.

"He holds you to be a very good man indeed."

"Then I shall think higher of his opinion than ever," replied Joe; "and you may drop in his ear that I rate him high too, Thomas."

Thomas made no reply, but rose and went out. Then Joe addressed his kinsman.

"Have you got the date out of her?"

Johnny shook his head.

"She holds off naming the time."

"Not like her. We must all have a go at her. But if your father can't do it, who can?"

"If I can't, who can? That's the question, I should think."

They argued Dinah's delay and presently she returned.

"Susan did ought to go to bed," she said.

CHAPTER VII

AT GREEN HAYES

TO DINAH WAYCOTT there came an experience familiar enough, yet fraught with shock and grief to any man and woman of good will who is forced to suffer it. By gradual stages the truth had overtaken her, and now she knew that what in all honesty she believed to be love—the emotion that had made her accept John Bamsey and promise to marry him—was nothing more than such affection and regard as a sister might feel for a favourite brother. Their relations had in fact been upon that basis all their lives. She remembered Johnny as long as she remembered anything, for she had been but two years old when he was born, and they had grown up together. And now, possessing a mind that faced life pretty fearlessly, and blessed with clear reasoning powers, Orphan Dinah knew the truth.

First she considered how such an unhappy thing could have happened. When she accepted her lover, most fully and firmly she believed that her heart prompted. It did not beat quicker at his proposition, and for a time she could not feel sure; but before she accepted him she did feel sure and emphatically believed it was love that

inspired her promise. But now she knew that it was not love; and yet she could not tell why she knew it.

For the usual experience in such cases had not proved the touchstone. There was none else who had come into her life, awakened passion, and thus revealed the nature of her error with respect to John. No blinding light of this sort had shone upon the situation. But gradually, remorselessly, the truth crept into Dinah's brain, and she saw now that what she had taken for love was really an emotion inspired by various circumstances. Her stepfather had desired the match and expressed his delight at the thought; and since he was by far the most real and precious thing in the girl's life, his opinion unconsciously influenced her. Then, for private reasons, she desired to be away from Benjamin Bamsey's home—that also for love of him. The situation was complicated for Dinah by the fact that Jane Bamsey, John's sister, did not like her, and suffered jealousy under her father's affection for his foster-daughter. Dinah was some years older than Jane, and far more attractive to Mr. Bamsey, by virtue of her spirit and disposition, than Jane could ever be. Ben himself hardly knew this, but his wife very clearly perceived it. She was a fair woman and never agitated on the subject, though often tempted to do so. But she was human, and that her husband should set so much greater store upon Dinah than Jane caused her to feel resentment. Astonishment she could not feel, for, though the mother of Jane, she admitted that the elder girl displayed higher qualities, a mind more loyal, a heart more generous. But Jane was beautiful, and she could

be very attractive when life ran to her own pattern. Jane was not a bad daughter. She loved her mother and worshipped her brother. She might have tolerated Dinah too, but for the ever-present fact that her father put Dinah first. This had been a baneful circumstance for the younger's character; and it had served to lessen her affection for her father. The fact he recognised, without perceiving the reason. On the contrary, he held Dinah a very precious influence for Jane, and wished his own child more like the other. Friction from this situation was inevitable; and now Dinah, considering the various causes that had landed her in her present plight, perceived that not the least had been a subconscious impulse that urged her, for everybody's sake, to leave Lower Town and the home of her childhood. Thus she had deluded herself as well as others, and declared herself in love with a man while yet her heart was innocent of love. For a long time she had been conscious of something wrong. She had surprised herself painfully three months after her engagement by discovering that her forthright mind was seeing things in Johnny that she wished were different. This startled her, and instinct told her that she ought not to be so aware of these defects. Before they were engaged such things never clouded her affection; but in the light of altered relations they did. She grew to hate the lover's kiss, while the brother's kiss of old had been agreeable to her. Her kiss had not changed; but his had. He was in love, heart and soul, and Dinah understood that well enough. No hope of any revelation existed for him. If he could be unselfish, it was with her; if he could be modest, it was

with her. But he was changing now, and the recent evidence of his irritation on Hazel Tor Dinah recognised as perfectly natural and reasonable.

Still she hesitated before the melancholy conviction that she could not marry John, and the vision of the family when they heard it. She began to be sorry, but not for herself. She was concerned, first for John, and then for her foster-father. She was also in a lesser degree regretful for Mrs. Bamsey, and even for Jane; but she judged that their tribulation would be allayed by two things: first, in the conviction that John was well out of it; secondly, at the knowledge that Dinah herself would leave Green Hayes, Ben Bamsey's farm. She could not stop after the events now foreshadowed. Thus she hung on the verge, but had not taken the inevitable step upon a Sunday when Lawrence Maynard visited Lower Town according to his promise and came to tea.

Green Hayes was 'a welcoming sort of place,' as the owner always declared, though at first glance it did not seem so. The farmhouse was built of granite and faced with slate, which caused it to look sulky, but made it snug. A wide farmyard extended before the face of the dwelling, and pigeons and poultry lent liveliness and movement to it. A great barn, with a weathered roof of slate, extended on one side of the yard, and orchards and large kitchen gardens arose behind it; for fruit and vegetables were a feature of Mr. Bamsey's production.

Maynard was welcomed, and found that Dinah had made more of his past succour than seemed necessary. He discovered also whence the young

woman had derived her directness of speech and clear vision, for Mr. Bamsey displayed these qualities, though in a measure tempered by age and experience. On the subject of himself he could be specially clear. He did not mind who knew his failings.

He was a man of moderate height, grey-bearded and grey-headed. His nose had been flattened by an accident in youth, but his face was genial, and his eyes of a pleasant expression. His wife was larger than himself—a ponderous woman, credited with the gift of second sight. She had been beautiful, and was still handsome, with regular features, a clear skin, and large cow-like eyes. Jane Bamsey, her daughter, a girl of eighteen, rejoiced in more than the beauty of youth. She was lovely, but she had a disposition that already made her mouth pout oftener than it laughed. She was jealous of Dinah, though the elder girl entertained no unfriendly emotion towards Jane. She admired her exceedingly and loved to look at her fine curves, round black eyebrows, lustrous, misty blue eyes, and delicate, dainty nose. Jane's real grievance lay in the fact of her father's preference; but when, in a moment of passion, she had flung this truth at Dinah, the elder disarmed her by admitting it and explaining it.

"If you thought for foster-father like I do, and loved him half as well as what I do, you'd have nothing to grumble about, and he'd love you so well as he loves me," said Dinah; "but you don't."

"I'd do all you do for him, and more, if you wasn't here," declared Jane, and met an uncompromising answer.

"No, you wouldn't, or anything like what I do; and well you know it, you pretty dear."

Mr. Bamsey thanked Lawrence heartily for his good offices in the past on Dinah's behalf, and Faith Bamsey, his wife, echoed him.

"The blessing is she ain't marked," said Ben. "I much feared she would be, but such is the health of her blood that she healed instanter, and now you see nought but a red mark that grows fainter every day."

The visitor regarded Dinah's face and admitted it was so.

"Wonderful," he said. "I never should have thought that ugly gash would have cleared up so well."

"Nature's on the side of the young," replied Benjamin. "She spoils 'em, you may say. Not that anything could spoil Dinah."

"You can, and you do," she said.

"Oh no. 'Tis the other way round. You'd keep me in cotton wool if you could. I'm feared of my life for Johnny that you'll make him soft."

"And tell him he's not to go out and fight the poachers by night, and silly things like that," added Jane.

"More likely offer to go out and help him fight 'em," said Maynard, and Ben applauded.

"That's right! You know her better than Jane do seemingly. Dinah won't stand between John and his duty—that's certain sure."

"No woman will ever come between my son and his duty," said Faith. "There's some young men be born with a sense of duty, and some gets it by their training, and some, of course, never do. But John was doing his duty when he was five years old—came natural to him."

"And what's the duty of a five-year-old, ma'am?" asked Lawrence. He found himself easy and comfortable with the Bamseys.

"To obey his parents and trust in 'em first and last and always," answered Faith.

"Your son's one of the lucky ones, that finds it easier to be good than anything else," suggested Maynard.

"Nobody can get high virtues by nature," replied Mrs. Bamsey. "They've got to be worked for. Nobody's ever out of the wood, and them that think they stand be often most like to fall."

Mrs. Bamsey, from whom moral principles flowed easily at a touch, proceeded awhile, and Maynard's spirits began to fall. His own standards of conduct resulted from innate qualities of mind rather than along the directions of dogma. He perceived that Mrs. Bamsey's ideas ran in fixed channels, and felt glad when Benjamin, upon some opinion of his wife, took up the conversation. She had been saying, with regard to her son, that while he owed certain qualities to herself, his father was also apparent in him. Dinah supported her, but Benjamin was not so sure.

"No," he said. "I can't flatter myself that John has to thank me for much. His mother stares out of him, you may say, and all the best is hers. But there's a wicked side of me that John haven't got, I'm glad to say."

Dinah laughed.

"And what might your wicked side be, Mr. Bamsey, if it ain't a secret?" inquired Lawrence.

"No secret at all. I've got no secrets. Hate 'em. It's just human nature."

"He's invented it," said Dinah. "It ain't true. He dreams it."

"It's very true indeed, and shows a weak spot where one didn't ought to be," confessed Ben. "If you'll believe it, Maynard, I often wake up of a night, somewhere about two o'clock, a changed man! Yes, I do; and then the whole face of nature looks different, and I find myself in a proper awful frame of mind against my fellow creatures. I mistrust 'em, and take dark views against 'em, setting out their wrongs and wickedness. At such times I'll even plan to sack a harmless chap, and lash myself up into a proper fury, and think the fearfulest things against man, woman, and child. I'll go so far as to cuss the cat, because she haven't caught a mouse for a week! If the folk were to see me at such a moment, I dare say they wouldn't know me."

"What d'you say, ma'am?" asked Maynard.

"I say nothing, because I'm always asleep," answered Mrs. Bamsey.

"Do it pass off pretty quick, master?"

"It do. I slumber again after a bit, and with daylight you may say butter wouldn't melt in my mouth. I don't write none of they rude letters I've invented, and I don't sack nobody—not even the cat. I wake up calm and patient with the neighbours and quite ready to forgive 'em, as I hope to be forgiven."

"'Tis a sort of safety-valve, I expect," suggested Lawrence.

"That's just what it is. If you can send your neighbours to hell without them knowing it, it don't hurt them and comforts your nerves wonderful sometimes."

"A very shameful thought, Ben," declared his wife, "and you oughtn't to say such things."

"I know it's shameful. But I only tell the

man these facts to open his eyes and show him how much better Johnny be than his father."

"May he never have nothing to cuss about," hoped Lawrence.

"I don't see how he ever can, when he's got Dinah."

"Yes—when," said Jane Bamsey. "He's got to wait Dinah's pleasure till the stroke of Doom seemingly."

Maynard had been admiring the younger girl; but he noticed that her beauty was clouded by discontent. There chimed also a note in her voice that carried with it slight, indefinite protest. His own voice embraced the identical note; but he was not aware of that.

"No politics, Jane," said Mrs. Bamsey. "You never did ought to strike into family affairs before a stranger."

"Mr. Maynard's not a stranger," argued Jane. "We've heard lots about him from Johnny, and Dinah too."

"That's right," said Lawrence.

Benjamin Bamsey nursed an old Skye terrier and scratched its back with a bunch of keys. He talked of dogs and cattle a while; then they all went to tea. Faith Bamsey asked after Susan.

"She's quite recovered, ma'am. She was in a mind to come over herself to-day, being wishful to see you; but her father wanted her help. He's very busy with his figures this afternoon."

Faith shook her head.

"Just like him—to put off his duty all the week, then do it on the Lord's Day."

"He went to worship in the morning, however, as he generally does."

"That's to the good, then."

"Soosie-Toosie's one of the best women on this earth," said Dinah, "only she's too much of a doormat. So cruel busy that she's never got time to think what she owes herself."

"She likes it," declared Jane. "She likes being driven about and never getting even with her work."

"If work is prayer, her life is a prayer," answered Mr. Bamsey.

"It's a prayer that never gets answered, then," replied Jane. "A dog's life really, only Susan don't see it, more than any other dog would, I suppose."

"Don't talk so free, Jane," urged her mother.

"She'll work herself to the bone and die afore her time, I expect," continued Mrs. Bamsey's daughter. "Then very like you'll see her ghost, mother."

This gave Lawrence an opportunity to inquire concerning Faith Bamsey's famous gift.

"Is it true, as they tell, that you be a ghost-seer, ma'am?" he asked.

"I am," she replied placidly. "It runs in my family and I take no credit for it."

"Never afeared?"

"Never. They come and they go. 'Tis just something in my nature that lets my eyes see more than other people. I'll see the spectrums any time—just the ghostes of dead folk, that flicker about where they used to live sometimes; and if I be that way by chance when they be there, then I see 'em."

"And do they see you, ma'am?"

"I can't say as to that. Sometimes I recognise the creatures as people that lived in my time and memory; sometimes I do not. Only last week

I see old Noah Parsons hanging over New Bridge, just as he did in life times without count, looking down over to see if there was any fish moving."

"And mother seed Lazarus Coomstock in Holne Wood not a month after he was teeled¹—didn't you, mother?" asked Jane.

"I did," answered Mrs. Bamsey. "I saw him outside his own house on the day of the sale, with live neighbours at his elbows—for all the world as though he'd come with the rest to bid for the things."

"A terrible queer gift," said Maynard. "Have you handed it on to Miss Jane here, I wonder?"

"No," declared Jane. "I've never seen a ghost, and never want to."

"You be young yet. Perhaps when you get up to years of discretion you'll see 'em."

"When Jane gets up to years of discretion I'll give a party," laughed Ben; but Jane did not laugh.

"You always think I'm a fool, father; and you'll always be wrong," she snapped. Then she got up and left the room.

"You didn't ought to poke fun at her," said Faith. "You know she don't like being thought a child—least of all by you."

"If you make jokes, you must take 'em," said Ben. "Jane's got a very sharp tongue for her age, and nobody doubts her wits; but if a father can't make a laugh at the expense of his child—no, no—we mustn't truckle under to Jane."

Lawrence struck in again. He was still considering Mrs. Bamsey's alleged second sight.

"Would you say that John has got your gift, ma'am?" he asked.

"Time will show," replied Faith.

¹ *Teeled*—buried.

"I hope he won't," said Dinah. "Because, in his business as water-keeper, it might confuse him a lot."

Then Ben grew serious and set down his old dog, which had returned to his lap after tea was ended.

"There's church bell," he said, "and us be going. Have you worshipped at our church yet, Maynard?"

The thin tinkle of bell music fell from the wooded height above Green Hayes.

"No," said Lawrence. "I have not. I don't go to church."

Ben shrank, and his wife started and tightened her lips.

"Ban't you a Christian, then?"

"Couldn't say as to that, ma'am; but I don't find church-going help me, so I don't go."

"Dear, dear—that's bad," said Mr. Bamsey, while his wife put further searching questions.

"Do you say your prayers, or do you not, if I may ask?"

"I say my prayers—yes."

She looked at him very suspiciously.

"We're bid to go," she said; "and you didn't ought to feel any doubt as to whether you're a Christian or not, did he, Ben?"

"Certainly he did not," answered her husband. Then he brightened and made a suggestion.

"You come along of us to-night. Won't hurt you, and you'll very like catch a grain that'll sprout. That's the beauty of church-going: 'tis like rough shooting—you never know what you're going to flush. And our parson's a man that abounds in plain truths."

"Come, Mr. Maynard," said Dinah.

"Certainly I will if I may," he replied.

"If us can throw a light for your soul, you won't have took your tea in vain," suggested Mrs. Bamsey.

"And have got supper by it in the bargain," added Ben, "for you'll have to bide after."

"No, no—no occasion at all."

"Yes, you must," said Dinah. "They'll have finished at Falcon Farm long afore you can get back."

Therefore Lawrence Maynard joined the party at evensong and sat between Jane and Dinah. Jane was indifferent, but Dinah shared her hymn-book with him. He did not sing, however, though it gave him pleasure to hear her do so. She was devout and attentive; Jane was not. He praised the sermon afterwards, and told Mr. Bamsey that it was full of sense. When supper had ended, he thanked them for their kindness to a lonely man, and Benjamin trusted that he would come again. Dinah also pressed him, and Jane, who was now in a very fascinating and gracious mood, ordered him to do so.

"If you don't, we shall think you don't like us," she said.

He was grateful, and left them in an amiable spirit.

They discussed him after he had gone, and Mrs. Bamsey felt dubious.

"He's rather a secret sort of man in my opinion," she said.

"He is," admitted Ben; "but he's secret by accident, not nature, I believe. I took note of him. He's got a grievance against life, I reckon; but what it may be, of course we don't know."

"I'll get it out of him," said Jane.

"No, you won't, my dear," answered her father.
"Dinah's more like to than you."

"I don't want his secrets," declared Dinah.

"He won't be in no hurry to tell 'em,"
prophesied Mrs. Bamsey. "He's not that sort."

CHAPTER VIII

THE OLD FOX-HUNTER

JOE STOCKMAN had tried a new haricot bean for his own table, and was now engaged in the easy task of shelling the brown husks and extracting the pearly white seeds. It amused him and put no strain upon his faculties. But he tired of it after ten minutes, went into his kitchen, and called Susan.

"Get on with they beans, there's a dear; I've been at 'em till my fingers ache; and we'll have a dish to-night for supper if you please. And I'll poke round and see if I can pick up a wood-pigeon to go with 'em. 'Tis soft by the feel of it this morning and a little exercise won't do me no harm."

She nodded, and getting a gun, Joe disappeared with his dogs. He skirted an outlying field, where Maynard and Palk were pulling mangel-wurzel. Bending low they plodded along, with the rhythmic swing and harmonious action proper to their work. The roots dropped on one side, the leaves were thrown down on the other, and behind each labourer extended long regular lines—one of mangel awaiting the cart, one of heavy leaves. Mr. Stockman praised the roots, put a task or two upon Lawrence and Thomas for later

in the day, and proceeded into the woods. It was Saturday, and when first they came there had been a general understanding that on the afternoon of that day leisure might be enjoyed at Falcon Farm as far as possible; but slowly the farmer appeared to forget this vague arrangement, and when Joe had proceeded after the wood-pigeons Palk pointed it out.

Lawrence conceded the fact.

"Best way is to tell him at the beginning of a week that you want next Saturday afternoon off—then he knows and it goes through all right," he said.

"You might think it was the best way," answered Palk; "but it ain't, because I've tried it. If you do that, he'll run you off your legs all the week, and hit upon a thousand jobs, and always remind you about Saturday, and say he knows as you'll be wanting to put in a bit extra, owing to the holiday coming."

Maynard laughed and stood up for a moment to rest the muscles of his back.

"It'll take cleverer chaps than us to be even with him."

"A cruel, vexatious man, and knows how to balance the good against the bad so clever that nobody in his senses would leave him," grumbled the elder.

They continued to pull the great golden roots from the earth; then Palk, whose mind still ran on his Saturday afternoon, explained that he had intended to meet a friend at Ashburton and would now be unable to do so.

"If that's it, don't bother. I'm free, and I can do all he wanted," said Lawrence.

"If you can, then I'm obliged," answered the

horseman. "It's somebody I'm very wishful to see, because he married my sister. She's dead, but she had a son, and I like to know, for his mother's sake, how he's going on."

Maynard was not interested and they spoke no more. At the side of the field they were building up the roots into a 'cave'—packing them together and then heaping earth upon them. The hour was early noon, and at the end of the row they desisted, emptied the full cart at the hedge-side, and presently went in to dinner.

Mr. Stockman did not return and they ate it with Susan. She was perturbed at the necessity of going to Ashburton for her father.

"He wants half-a-dozen things, and I'm so properly busy here this week-end that I don't know how I'll do it," she declared, unaware that Thomas was going down.

Slowly it dawned over his mind that he might serve her. He hesitated, for he dreaded making any original proposition. Maynard, however, helped him.

"Tom's going in," he said. "Can't he do it?"

"I've no right to trouble him," answered Soosie-Toosie.

"Why not, then? I'm sure he'll do anything he can."

"He might be busy on his own account?"

"He'll make time if he can save you."

They debated the question as though Mr. Palk were not present. He listened quite silently; but finally, when it became impossible not to state his opinion on the point, he spoke.

"If you'll write them down, I will carry out the items, miss."

"It's asking too much," hesitated Susan.

"It may be, or it may not," he answered. "But I'll do it—for you."

She thanked him very heartily.

"There's the patterns from the tailor first. Father wants a new warm suit, and be hopeful Mr. West have got the same stuff as before; but he'll give you a little book of patterns, as will go in your pocket, I should think. And there's they cough-drops made with black currants for father, and his boots, that went to be mended, and his new leggings."

"Nought for yourself?" asked Thomas.

"That'll be enough. What I want can wait."

"No," he said slowly. "If there's any chores for you, set 'em down. In for a penny, in for a pound."

"A reel of thread at Miss Bassett's shop and a pound of loaf sugar—but there, you've got enough without them."

"Put 'em down."

"And if tailor's shut, will you knock at the side door?"

"I'll knock at the side door if tailor's shut," promised Thomas. He was really gratified at receiving this commission.

He went and duly returned with the patterns for Joe's new suit, his cough lozenges, and the rest. Both Susan and Mr. Stockman expressed the deepest thanks.

"Nevertheless, Thomas, another time it may be better, in my humble judgment, if each of us does his appointed task," said the master. "You see, if I may say so, it puts us out of our stride when you do my daughter's lawful work, and Maynard does yours. I'm a great believer in method, Thomas, as you are yourself, thank God;

so I feel pretty sure you'll put duty afore pleasure another time. And now I hope you're going to take a spot out of my new bottle of whisky along with me."

Mr. Palk replied nothing, but accepted the drink and hid his thoughts.

Next day Lawrence kept an engagement to see the old huntsman, Enoch Withycombe, and advanced their friendship. Maynard, under a common experience, had found that one man might charm his confidence in one direction, while another could win him upon a different plane. One string in him had vibrated to the geniality, tolerance, and worldly wisdom of his new master; while the bed-ridden man in the valley served to awaken a different interest and attract the young man on impersonal grounds. Thus it happened that while Joe Stockman knew most about Lawrence's actual history, Mr. Withycombe alone learnt the result of the young man's experience in terms of opinion and belief. The one had sympathy and understanding for the objective events in Maynard's life, the other listened to the subjective convictions arising from those events.

Lawrence sat by the invalid's bed, for the day was cold and wet and Enoch had not risen. Melinda was out for the afternoon, and Maynard had undertaken to keep her father company and make the tea.

"You can only judge of things by your own experience," he said, in answer to a chance remark. "You must talk of life as you find it, I reckon, not as somebody else finds it. It's what God Almighty does to us must decide our view about Him—not what He does to our neighbours."

Enoch was alert at once.

"A doubtful view," he answered.

"My argument is that God Almighty have treated me like a cat treats a mouse. Let me go a little way in hope, then down comes His Hand; let me think I'm clear and free of doubt and difficulty and begin to get my breath and look round, and He pounces again."

"That's too ownself a view—too narrow far. You're not everybody."

"No; but I'm somebody; and if God makes a mouse, He ought to respect it; and since He's made me, He ought to respect me, so long as I'm respectable. If you make a child, it's your duty to cherish it, and think for it, and be jealous for it."

"But God don't make us like we make our children," said Enoch. "We ain't His own flesh and blood, Maynard. With a child, the kinship's closer. Our blood be in them and our faults, belike, are handed on. In fact, 'tis a terrible serious thing, knowing yourself, to make a child in your own image; and that's why Nature tickles us to do it afore we've got the wits to think twice. But God—that's different."

"Why? Either He's our Eternal, loving Father, or He ain't? And we're told He is. Then why don't He go one better than our good earthly fathers, Mr. Withycombe, and put a bit more of Himself into us to start us safer? But He won't come between a man and his past, or save your character from the tyrant things stuffed into it by your havage.¹"

"The sins of the fathers are visited on the children, my lad, because the Lord's reason-

¹ *Havage*—ancestry.

able and can't strain His own laws for special cases."

"Then He's weaker than man, who can do so. A just judge will often strain a law in particular cases, when he knows that to enforce it would be unjust. You wouldn't whip your child for showing the sins you put into him yourself?"

"Yes, I would, if I could help whip 'em out of him by so doing. I know a man, who told me he never felt his own sins come back to roost so bitter cruel as when he had to flog his son for committing the same. These things are dark mysteries, you must know, and we can only see 'em, not solve 'em."

"It comes down to this," said Maynard: "either you end in believing in God, or not."

"Yes, it comes down to God, or no God," admitted Enoch. "And if you do believe in Him, then it's no manner of use yelping at Him, or whining at the way He treats you. You've got to knuckle under and there's an end of it. And if you don't believe in Him, then it's equally silly to snivel; because, if there's no God, then you might as well be a hound and bay at the moon as talk hard words against Him."

"Do you believe in Him, if I may ask?"

"For a time I did in my fox-hunting days. Then, when I was smashed, I flung Him over, lock, stock, and barrel, and didn't worry no more. But now I believe in Him again."

"I believe in Him too," said Lawrence.

"Then believe in Him, and don't waste your wind and fret your wits blaming Him, because He don't do to others as He teaches us to do to others."

"One thing's certain: you can't have it both ways."

"You never spoke a truer word," admitted Mr. Withycombe. "Fox-hunting taught me that afore you were born. You've looked at life with seeing eyes, no doubt, and you must have marked lots of men treated worse than you, as well as better. The machine treats the blades of grass much the same, whether they be tall or short, and to be under the harrow, or under the weather, is the common lot of us all. Only a man's self knows his luck—not them looking at him from outside."

Maynard considered this philosophy, but it did not tempt him to explain the reason for his own pessimistic attitude.

Presently Enoch challenged him.

"And what have you got to say against that?" he asked.

"Nothing at all. The point of view's everything, and if you, from your bed of sickness, can feel all's for the best, then I ought."

"There's all sorts of beds of sickness," answered Mr. Withycombe; "and no doubt wisdom would say that sickness of the body is a lesser evil than sickness of the mind. It's a very natural thing that a young man like you should be more interested in your own case than any other, and think it harder than any other, but there's always the future for a young man."

"The past can bitch up the future past praying for, however," argued Maynard, and the hunter considered the statement.

"The future be at the mercy of the past in a manner of speaking, I grant," he said; "but a lot

depends on whether we hurt ourselves in the past, or was only hurt by other people. Of course bad blood in our veins and vices can maim our future past praying for, as you say; but, with an even-minded man like you, I should judge you'd always been master of your past, and so ought to face the future more hopeful than what you seem to."

Lawrence still felt no desire to go into details. He guessed that Mr. Withycombe must be a great talker, and knew not as yet whether confidences would be sacred.

"I dare say you're right. It may be a fool's trick always to keep the past before your eyes and let it shadow the future. However, you'll be pretty tired of me and my affairs. The thing is to take big views."

"It is—and to take views that ain't got the figure of No. 1 stuck in front of 'em, Maynard. The first thing to do, if you be going to set up for a thinker, is to rule yourself out, and all your hopes and fears. Get me my tea. It's good of you and other men to be here now and again, because it gives my daughter a chance to stretch her legs and get the news. Now I should call her a sensible pattern of woman."

"So she is, then. And a very popular woman, Mr. Withycombe."

"She's one that haven't let ill-fortune sour her. No childer, and a husband lost before his time. But there she is, fifty year old and facing life and its duties and the dull task of a bed-ridden father, all so quiet and seemly as need be. No grumbling—not a sigh. I'm devilish cranky when the pain's bad; and though we can all be very wise to our neighbours of a Sunday afternoon,

like this, there's times when we ain't very wise to our relations on weekdays."

Maynard got the tea from the kitchen and arranged a bed-table for the invalid.

"Fire's right for toasting," he said. "Shall I make some?"

"Do so. You don't tell me the reasons for your dark view of things and I don't want 'em—don't think it. But I'll ax you something of a private nature, because you'll respect confidence. No need to answer, however, if you feel it's none of your business. And it certainly is not. Does Joe Stockman ever tell about Melinda, or give his opinion upon her?"

"He does. He's got a mighty high opinion of her, and says she's a burning light and a lesson to all the women. He was figuring up her age a bit back-along."

Enoch laughed.

"Ah! But you can't have it both ways, as we said just now. Master Joe's always crying out about being an old man, but he don't want to feel an old man, or look an old man where my Melinda's concerned. I read Joe like a book, I may tell you. He often thinks what a fine thing it would be to wed Melinda."

"He's always been uncommon friendly to me," said Lawrence.

"Long may he continue so."

Maynard sat another hour with the old man and the talk drifted to fox-hunting.

When Melinda returned, she found her father in the best of tempers and the tea-things cleared away and washed up.

"My!" she exclaimed. "What a husband you'll make some of these days, Mr. Maynard!"

"And he's going to come again," said Enoch. "He's promised. We'll set the world right between us afore we've done—him and me."

"You let what my father says go in at one ear and out at the other," warned Melinda.

"You won't fright him," declared her parent. "He's going to be a great thinker some day, same as me!"

Then Lawrence went his way.

CHAPTER IX

A HOLIDAY FOR SUSAN

THE CHURCH OF ST. PETER'S at Buckland-in-the-Moor has a fine waggon roof and a noble little oak screen. The windows are mostly of uncoloured glass, and the light of day illuminates the building frankly. It stands, with its burying-ground round about it, on a plateau uplifted among sycamore and pine. A few old tombs lie in the yard with others of recent date; but for the most part, on this January day, the frosty grass glittered over the mounds of unrecorded dead. The battlemented tower rose in the midst of meadows at a step in the great slope from the Beacon. Trees surrounded the gap, ascending above and falling below in their winter nakedness. It was a place of peace and distinction, marked by the quality of human care devoted to it.

The five bells rang through the frosty morning, and Melinda Honeysett, with her brother Jerry Withycombe, stood by the parapet of the burying-ground and looked across the valley, where Lower Town lay far beneath. It glimmered pale grey amidst its dim orchards and ploughed lands, and beyond it Dartmoor flung out ragged ridges from south to north, clean and dark under the low sun.

The man's eyes sought the roof-tree of Green Hayes, which made a respectable splash above the lesser habitations of Lower Town; and Melinda knew very well of whom he was thinking. Jerry resembled his father, the old fox-hunter. He was large and finely put together, but he lacked his father's intelligence and possessed no individuality of character. At present he was in love, and the fact transformed him, lent its own temporary qualities and lifted him into a personality.

"If you'd only see it, Jerry, you'd understand she's too young and selfish to make any man happy yet awhile," said Melinda. "I don't say she won't be a good wife some day. That may come to her; but it haven't yet. She's not wife-old up till now, however you look at her—a cat-handed, careless girl about the house, and never got her thought on her work."

"Well, I shan't be no damn good in this world without her," answered Jerry frankly. "That's a cast-iron certainty; and she haven't turned me down yet, whether or no."

"She don't take you serious, however."

"She don't take nothing serious. And I don't take nothing serious but her. We'd neighbour very well, and her father haven't got a word against me."

"Nobody's got nothing against you," said Mrs. Honeysett. "I should think not—nor yet against anybody of the name. Lord knows I don't blame you for falling in love with the girl—or any man. She's a lovely creature, and where she came from exactly among they homely people, who can say? If one believed the old stuff you might say she was a changeling."

"She ain't a fairy; but she's the only creature in the world that's any good to me."

"Well, you study her character when you're along with her. She ain't a very contented girl, remember."

"She would be if Dinah was away. 'Tis beastly hard on John, Dinah not saying the word, and I wouldn't suffer it if I was him."

"You wait. You don't know what you'd suffer, or what you wouldn't. The thing to find out for you is Jane's idea of your opinions and prospects. They like a man to be wiser than them."

"'Tis no good my pretending to be cleverer than her, because she knows I ain't."

"Don't you eat humble pie, all the same. God help the man she masters."

They were still talking when a pair approached from Falcon Farm. Mr. Palk was a steadfast churchgoer, and to-day he had brought Susan Stockman.

"Wonders never cease!" cried Melinda. "How did you get off to worship, Soosie?"

Susan was excited at her rare adventure.

"Father's away. He's gone down to a friend at Kingsbridge for a day or two's shooting. Decided yesterday and went off in the afternoon, and Mr. Palk and Mr. Maynard was quite content to let dinner look after itself."

"Why not? 'Tis less than human of Joe to keep you moiling Sunday morning."

"But he always comes himself," said Susan.

Melinda shook her head.

"'Tis no good being religious if we won't let other people be," she answered.

The gaunt woman smiled.

"Well, here I be to-day anyway; and the walk, which Mr. Palk allowed me to take along with him, have rested me wonderful."

"Very proud, I'm sure," said Thomas.

They returned together after the service, and Mrs. Honeysett could not fail to notice that Susan's adventure had done her good. But her Sunday gown did not please Melinda.

"You ought to get yourself a new dress and a thicker jacket," she declared. "You could put your finger through that old thing, and the moths be got in the neck of it."

"I hardly ever want go-to-meeting clothes," explained Susan, and the other woman grew mildly indignant.

"You be so meek as a worm, Soosie-Toosie. No doubt a very Christian virtue; but it do make me a thought wild off and on. Not a word against your father, of course, but a man's a man, and 'tis their nature to put on us; and 'tis our duty to see they don't. You've got to watch the best of 'em like a cat watches a mouse, else they'll come between you and your rights. The creatures can't help it. They be built so, like all the other male things. Why, I'll flare out against my own father, love him as I do, and a bed-lier though he is, if I find he's forgetting I'm flesh and blood and thinking I'm a machine."

Mr. Palk nodded vigorously to himself at these sentiments, but he did not speak.

"I know my place," said Susan.

"That's just what you do not, and you'll make me cross in a minute and undo the good of church. You're a reasonable creature, ain't you?"

"I hope so, Melinda."

"You've got a soul, ain't you?"

"I believe so. It's a poor come-along-of-it if I haven't."

Susan looked almost frightened.

"Very well, then, act according. You wouldn't cling after the next world so frantic if you was having a better time in this one. If your Maker had meant you to be a beast of burden, He'd have made you one."

"We're taught to bear other people's burdens, my dear."

"Yes, but we ain't taught to do other people's work—not if they can do it themselves."

"I only do my own work, Melinda."

"Not a chance! You do a cook's work and an all-work's work and you're a sewing machine thrown in, not to mention washing for three men and a boy, and all the thousand odd jobs from sun-up till you drop in your bed."

Mr. Palk could not contain himself.

"Gospel!" he said. "Gospel!"

"To do their work for 'em is to encourage our neighbours in selfishness and laziness; and Lord knows such vices don't want encouraging in the men," continued Melinda.

"What would you do if you was in power?" asked Susan. "What could you do, for that matter?"

"I'd strike," replied the elder. "I'd strike for a maid-of-all-work first. I'd tell your father I was his daughter. He wants reminding."

"He's terrible fond of me, however. He looks to me if he scratches his finger."

"I'm not saying he's not a very fine man indeed, because we all know he is; but I'm saying you ought to help him to be finer still. What do you think, Mr. Palk?"

But, at a direct question, Thomas subsided. His caution thrust upon his private feelings and kept him quiet. He shook his head.

"Least said, soonest mended, ma'am. I wouldn't go for to offer an opinion—though I might have my views. A man's a right to his views, haven't he?"

Melinda snorted.

"See how they take sides against us!" she said.

But this Thomas would not allow.

They parted presently, and, after the service, Susan proceeded homeward with the labourer. They spoke very little, but, apropos of some remark from Mr. Palk, Susan committed herself to the opinion that animals were very backward in their minds.

"They be," admitted Thomas. "Their ignorance is something awful. Take a cat, generally counted a clever creature. He's been catching mice since creation, no doubt, and yet don't know to this day what a mouse be called!"

With such reflections they beguiled their journey, and each was cheered in a subconscious fashion by the companionship of the other.

Soosie-Toosie, for her part, felt increase of well-being from her religious exercises.

"You shan't suffer, you men," she said, as they entered the wicket gate. "Give me fifteen minutes and 'twill all be hotted up."

CHAPTER X

TALKING WITH DINAH

ON A PUBLIC HOLIDAY in early spring Joe Stockman suddenly declared an urgent necessity to communicate with Arthur Chaffe at Lower Town on the subject of some hurdles.

"And if you saw your way to take the air in that direction, Maynard, I shall be more than a bit obliged," he said.

Susan mildly protested.

"'Tis a holiday, father, and Mr. Maynard's bound for pleasuring, be sure," she said.

"I know, and I hope he is," answered her father; "but I thought perhaps he might be taking a bit of a walk and would so soon go that way as another. 'Tis no odds, of course, if not convenient. I must meet a few men in Ashburton myself—more business than pleasure, however."

"I'll go, then," suggested Susan. "I'm wishful to see Faith Bamsey."

Lawrence, however, declared himself very willing to go.

"I'm not for the fair," he said, "and would just so soon walk down to the carpenter as anywhere else. I've got no use for revels."

"I'm much to blame, mind you," confessed Joe. "I heap blame on myself, because I did

ought to have written to Chaffe on the subject a month ago; but it slipped my memory along of my rheumatism, and being so busy helping you chaps afterwards to spread muck on the land. Then I was with the shepherd a lot too, and so on. But Chaffe's always got a little stock of seasoned hurdles in his big store, and he can send me just so many as ever he likes up to fifty yards of 'em; and if he can cart them up to-morrow, the better pleased I'll be. And if he can't, I must get 'em elsewhere, bitter sorry as I shall feel to do so. Make that clear, Lawrence. And say I'm blaming myself a good bit about it. I ought to have given Arthur time."

Accordingly the cowman set out for Lower Town and took his holiday on foot. The day was fine, and he told Soosie-Toosie that he should not be back before milking. She was taking no pleasure herself, but glad to devote the day to some spring cleaning.

Maynard had spent a second Sunday afternoon with the Bamseys, and now he called there on his way to Mr Chaffe with Susan's message for Faith. But Mrs. Bamsey was from home with Benjamin. They and Jane had driven early to Ashburton and were taking holiday. Dinah had not gone, and she answered the door when Lawrence knocked.

She was surprised to see him.

"I never!" she said. "Why ain't you gone to the fair?"

"No use for fairs. Why ain't you for that matter, miss?"

"No use for them either. I'm under the weather a bit. Come in and have a tell. There's nobody home but me."

Their acquaintance had ripened a little, for Dinah came to Falcon Farm sometimes with messages. Lawrence admired Dinah's straightforward mind, but was puzzled at some things about her; while she, inspired by her step-father's opinion that the man had some hidden grievance against life, found him interesting. She did not think he had a grievance; but he was reticent concerning himself and he never spoke about his earlier existence, though she had invited him to do so.

"Where's Johnny?" asked the visitor.

"Fairing—or so he said; but if truth's known I expect he's to work. He often gives out he's away when he isn't. He's caught a chap once or twice like that."

"Ah! He knows his business. I expect he's down on the water somewhere. I should have guessed, now, you would take him his dinner by the river presently."

Dinah was rather aghast at this pleasantry. It argued an intimate knowledge of lovers' ways on the part of the other.

"You might think so," she said. "And often I have, for that matter. But we're out—my fault, too."

"Never!"

"Yes—and that's why I say I'm under the weather."

"Well, Miss Susan wants Mrs. Bamsey to lend her the cheese press. We're going to have a try at cheese-making. Mr. Stockman's got an idea the thing be well worth trying; and Miss Susan wants to come over and have a tell about it and learn Mrs. Bamsey's wisdom. And the clutch of chickens be ready for you."

"Didn't you hear me say I was under the weather?"

"Twice. Yes. Sorry. It'll come right. Lovers' quarrels be nought."

"What have you heard Cousin Joe say about me and Johnny?"

"D'you want to know?"

"I do, then."

"He says you're not treating John fair, and that it's a black mark against you not fixing up the wedding."

"So it is, and nobody knows it better than me."

He said nothing, and she asked a curious question.

"Be you faithful, Mr. Maynard?"

"I hope so."

"I can talk to you. I've wanted to talk to you for a month, but held off. And now's the chance. I can trust you?"

He was a little uneasy.

"Don't you tell me anything you'll be sorry for."

"I'll tell you this. Johnny's sworn he won't see me no more till I name the day. And his people are on his side. And why don't I name the day? Can you answer that?"

"No, I can't—nor anybody else but your own self, I should think."

"What's love like?"

"You ought to know."

"That's the trouble. I did ought to know; but I don't. Only I know this bitter clear: I'm not in love with Johnny."

He was sorry for her, but not astonished to learn the truth. Indeed he had already guessed it.

"'Tis whispered you took him for Mr. Bamsey's sake."

"No, I can't be let off like that. I took him because I thought I did love him, and now, after keeping company just on a year, I know I do not. Now you're a man that understands things."

"Don't you fancy that. None on God's earth is more puzzled about things than me. I've had a puzzling life, I may tell you."

"I haven't. Till now my life's been as clear as sunshine. But now—now I'm up against a pretty awful thing, and it's cruel hard to make up my mind. Was you ever really in love?"

"Never mind me."

"Was you ever in doubt, I mean?"

"Never."

"I don't ask for rudeness, but reason. There's nobody you can ask in my life, because they be all biased. I'm not thinking of myself. I'm just wondering this: Can I be the wife Johnny deserves to have if I don't love him? And ought I to marry him not loving him? Not because of my feelings, but because of his future. Think if you was him, and loved a woman as truly as he loves me, and you had to say whether you'd marry her and chance the fact she didn't love you, or, knowing she didn't, would give her up."

"That's not how it is, though. Johnny don't know you don't love him. I judge that by what he says, because he often drops in and talks openly, finding all on his side."

"What would you do?"

"If I wanted to marry a woman and she'd said 'yes,' but afterwards found herself mistook, I shouldn't love her no more."

"Then you don't know much about love."

"Very likely I don't."

"It's a selfish thing. If I was in love, I'd be like Johnny—and worse. A proper tigress, I expect."

"Are you in love?"

"No, I swear I'm not. Not with anybody. I've growed up, you see, since I said 'yes' to John. I was a child, for all my years, when I said it. Growing up ain't a matter of time; it's a matter of chance. And it comes back just to what I said. Would it be better for Johnny to marry him not loving him, because I've promised to do so, or would it be better for him if I told him I wasn't going to?"

"You'll decide right," he said. "And you don't want other people's advice. You know."

"I know what I'd like to do; but just because my own feeling is strong for telling him, I dread it."

"If you was to hold off much longer, he'd chuck you perhaps."

"Never. I'm his life. He says it and he means it."

"But to marry him would be your death?"

She nodded.

"Yes, I think."

"Perhaps you're wrong, however."

"Very likely. Be sporting. Don't think of me and don't think of him. Put us out of your mind and just say what you'd do if you was me."

He felt a little moved for her. It is pathetic to see a resolute creature reduced to irresolution. The manhood in him inclined Lawrence to take her part against the man. He liked Dinah better than Johnny, for the latter's arrogance and superior attitude to life at large did not attract Maynard.

"It's never right for a woman to marry a man she does not love," he said.

"You think so?"

"I do—I'm positive."

"Even if she's promised?"

"You promised because you thought you loved him. Now you know right well you don't. A proper man ought to bend to that, however much it hurts."

"There's something awful wrong about it. They want me away from here—Mrs. Bamsey and Jane—that's natural too. Though why I'm confiding in you I don't know. But you'll be faithful."

"I wish I could help you, miss."

"You have helped me, I reckon. I was half in a mind to go and see Enoch Withycombe; but he's old, and the young turn to the young."

"I dare say the old know best, along of experience."

"The old forget a lot. They always begin by telling you they remember what it was to be young themselves; but they don't. They can't remember some things."

"I dare say they can't."

"Will you come for a walk with me one day and show me that stone you was telling about—the face?"

"You remember that?"

"Yes; you was going to say more about it the last Sunday you was here; then you shut up rather sudden."

The idea of a walk with Dinah had certainly never entered Maynard's head. He remained silent.

"D'you think it would be wrong, or d'you only think it would be a nuisance?" she asked.

"It wouldn't be a nuisance—far from it, I'm sure; but as to whether it would be wrong—it would and it wouldn't, I fancy. It couldn't be wrong in itself; but seeing you're tokened to another man, you're not free to take walks with Dick, Tom, or Harry."

"John wouldn't like it?"

"Certainly he wouldn't. You know that."

"Would you mind my walking with another man if you was engaged to me?"

"Yes, I should, very much indeed; especially if I was in the same fix that John Bamsey is."

"Poor John. There's such a thing as liking a man too well to love him, Mr. Maynard."

"Is there?"

"I'm beginning to feel—there—I've wasted enough of your time. You won't go for a walk with me?"

"I'd like to go for a walk with you."

"I'll ask you again," she said. "Then, whether I marry John, or don't marry John, there'll be no reason against."

"I quite understand."

"To see that face on the stone. You'll find Mr. Chaffe in his workshop. Holidays are nought to him. Good-bye. Truth oughtn't to hurt honest people, ought it?"

"Nothing hurts like truth can, whether you're honest, or whether you're not."

He went forward, turning over with mild interest the matter of the conversation. He was little moved that she should have asked him to go for a walk. From any other young woman such a suggestion had been impressive; but not from her. He had noticed that she was never illusive, and quite unpractised in the art of lure or wile.

The stone he had mentioned was a natural face carved by centuries of time on the granite rocks of Hey Tor, some miles away. He had mentioned it in answer to a remark from Benjamin Bamsey, and then, for private but sufficient reasons, he had dropped the subject. His connection with the stone belonged to a time far past, concerning which he was not disposed to be communicative.

He fell to thinking on his own past for a time, then returned to Dinah. That she could confide in him inclined him to friendship. He was sorry for the plight in which she found herself. He hoped that she might drop Bamsey and find a man she could love. Whether she decided for John, or against him, it was probably certain she would leave Green Hayes; and that would mean distress for Benjamin Bamsey. His own thoughts were always enough for Maynard, and life had tended somewhat to freeze the sources of charity and human enthusiasm at the fount. He was not soured, but he was introspective to the extent that the affairs of his fellow creatures did not particularly challenge him. It seemed improbable that he would be woven into the texture of other lives again.

Arthur Chaffe was making a coffin.

"The dead can wait for no man," he said. "A poor old widow; but I'm under her command for the moment; and she shall have good work."

Lawrence told the matter of the hurdles, and Mr. Chaffe promised to do what he could.

"Joe treats time with contempt," he declared. "He did ought to have told me long ago; but I always reckon with the likes of him. I think for a lot of people and save them from their own slow

wits. Not that Stockman's got slow wits. His wits serve him very well indeed."

"He's a good farmer and a kind-hearted sort of man."

"So he is, so he is. You'll not hear me say a word against him."

"He sees that we earn our money. But he's fair."

"Ah! To be fair with your neighbour is a great gift. Now Joe's a man who takes a generous view of himself. But 'tis better to be hard on yourself and easy with other people—don't you think?"

"A fine thing to be hard on yourself, no doubt," admitted Lawrence.

"Yes, and them who are hardest on themselves will often be easiest with their neighbours."

"It's very easy in my opinion not to judge other people. But when life demands you to judge, then the trouble begins."

"When our own interest comes in, we often make a mess of it and judge wrong," admitted Mr. Chaffe. "And what I always say to anybody in a fix is this: to get outside the question and think how it would be if it was all happening to somebody else. If you've got the sense to do that, you'll often be surprised to find the light will shine."

"I expect that's true."

"Oh yes, it's true. I've proved it. A thing happens and you're chin deep in it. Then you say to yourself, 'Suppose I was dead and looking down on this job from my heavenly mansion, how would it seem?' Then you often get a gleam of sense that you never will while you're up against the facts and part of 'em. This coffin

will go along early to-morrow morning, and I'll bring half the hurdles this week in two or three loads; and tell Joe the price be up a thought since last year. He knows that as well as I do."

Maynard noted the instructions in a little pocket-book and presently departed. He took a meal of bread and cheese and cider at the inn hard by, then set out on an extended round, walked to Widecombe, tramped the moors, watched the swaling fires, that now daily burned upon them, and did not return home until the hour of milking.

CHAPTER XI

NEW BRIDGE

ON NEW BRIDGE, over Dart, stood Dinah, with the sun warm upon her face, while a first butterfly hovered on the golden broom at water's edge. She had sent a message to Johnny by his sister that she would meet him here, and now, while she waited, she speculated on the difference between the beauty of the May day and the ugliness of what she was about to do. She had decided at last. To her direct instincts delay had been a suffering. It was not for her own sake that she had delayed; but she knew now that her hesitation had been no kindness to Johnny, though endured largely out of affection for him. He had said that he would have nothing more to do with her until she named the day, and he was coming now under expectation of hearing her do so. Instead he must learn that the day could never be named.

She was full of sorrow, but no fear. She did not expect anybody to be patient, save her step-father.

Johnny appeared punctually, with his gun on his shoulder. They had not met for more than a month, but he ignored the past and greeted her with a kiss. She suffered it and reflected

that this was the last time he would ever kiss her.

"At last," he said. "I've hated this job, Dinah; and you'll never know how much I hated it; but what could I do?"

"You could have wondered why I held off, perhaps."

"And didn't I wonder? Didn't I puzzle myself daft about it? I don't know now why you hung back. It wasn't natural."

"It couldn't happen if it wasn't natural."

"If it was natural, then there was a reason," he answered, "and I'd like to hear it, Dinah."

"The reason is everything, John. I didn't know the reason myself for a good bit—the reason why I held away from you; and when I did, I was so put about that it shamed me of being alive."

"Better we don't go back, then. I'll ask no questions and forget. We'll begin again by getting married."

"No; the reason you've got to hear, worse luck. The reason why I behaved so strange was this, John: I'd made a terrible mistake—terrible for both of us. I thought the love that I had for you, and still have for you, and always shall, was the love of a woman for the man she's going to wed. Then, like a cloud, it came over me it was not. Listen—you must listen. I examined into it with all my senses tingling night and day. And I saw I'd slipped into this, being ignorant about love. I found that out by talking to girls, and by the things they said when they knew I was tokened to you. They looked at marriage quite different from me, and they showed me that love is another thing altogether.

They laughed at me when I talked, and said I didn't know what love meant. And—and—I didn't, Johnny. That's the naked truth."

He was looking at her with a flushed face.

"Get on—get on to the end of it," he said.

"Be patient. I'm bitter sorry. We was boy and girl for so many years, and I loved you well enough and always shall; but I don't know nothing about the sort of love you've got for me. The first I heard about it was from Jane. She knows. She understands far deeper about what love is than I do. Haven't you seen? Haven't you fretted sometimes—many times—because I couldn't catch fire same as you, when you touched me and put your arms round me? Didn't it tell you nothing?"

"How the devil should it? Women are different from men."

"Not they—not if they love proper. But how could you know that—you, who was never in love before? But if you'd only compare notes with other men."

"Men don't compare notes about sacred things like love."

"Don't they? Then they're finer than us. Women do. Anyway I found out, to my cruel cost, I was only half-fledged so far as you were concerned."

"I see. But you needn't lie about it—not to me. You loved me well enough, and the right way too. You can't shuffle out of it by pretending any trash about being different from other girls. And you're lying, I say, because it wasn't women have brought you to this. It was men. A man rather. Be plain, please, for I won't have no humbug. You've found some blasted man you

hanker after and think you like better than me. And I've a right to know who it is. And I will know."

"Hear me then, Johnny. May God strike me dead on this bridge, this instant moment, if there's any man in the world I love—or even care for. 'Tis long odds that love be left out of me altogether. And I can't marry you for that good reason. I thought only for you, and I'm thinking only for you now. It would have been far easier for me to go on with it than break. Can't you see that? But afterwards—when you'd found, as find you must, that I'd not loved you as you thought? Hell—hell—that's what it would have been for you."

"You can spin words. I won't. You're a godless, lying traitor—and—no—no—I call that back. You don't know what you're saying. Have some mercy on a man. You're my all, Dinah. Don't turn me down now. You can't do it; you can't do it. I'm content to let it be as it is. If you don't love me now, I'll make you love me. I'll—I'll—I'll give all and want nothing again! I believe you when you say there's not another man. I believe you with all my heart. And then—then why not me? Why not keep your oath and promise? If anything be left out of you, let me put it in. But there's nothing left out—nothing. You're perfect, and the wenches that made you think you wasn't ban't worthy to black your boots. For Christ's sake, don't go back on me—you can't—it wouldn't be you if you did."

"Don't make it worse than it is, dear John. I'm proud you could care for me so well; but don't you see, oh, don't you see that I can't act

a lie? I can't do it. Everything tells me not to do it. I must be fair; I must be straight. I don't love you like that. I thought I did, because I was a fool and didn't know better. It can't be. I'm fixed about it."

For a moment he was quiet. Then he picked up his gun, which he had rested against the parapet of the bridge. His face was twisted with passion. For a moment she believed that he meant to shoot her. She was conscious of her own indifference, for life seemed a poor possession at that moment.

"You can kill me if you like," she said. "I don't much want to go on living."

He cursed her.

"Lying bitch! Death's a damned sight too good for you. May your life be hell let loose, and may you come to feel what you've made me feel to-day. And you will, if there's any right and justice in life. And get out of Lower Town—d'you hear me? Get out of it and go to the devil, and don't let me see your face or hear your voice in my parents' home no more."

A market-cart came down the hill and trundled towards them, thus breaking into the scene at its climax. John Bamsey turned his back and strode down the river bank; Dinah hid her face from the man and woman in the cart and looked at the river.

But the old couple, jogging to Poundsgate, had not missed the man's gestures.

The driver winked at his wife.

"Lovers quarrelling!" he said; "and such a fine marnin' too. The twoads never know their luck."

With heavy heart sat Johnny by the river under

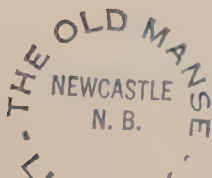
great pines and heard the rosy ringdoves over his head fluttering busily at their nest; while Dinah leant upon the parapet of the bridge and dropped big tears into the crystal of Dart beneath her.

CHAPTER XII

AFTERWARDS

THE SHOCK of Orphan Dinah's sudden action fell with severe impact in some directions, but was discounted among those of wider discernment. The mother of John had seen it coming; his father had not. In a dozen homes the incident was debated to Dinah's disadvantage; a few stood up for her—those who knew her best. In secret certain of John's acquaintance smiled, and while expressing sympathy with him, yet felt satisfaction that a man so successful and superior should receive his first dose of reality in so potent a shape.

The matter ran up and down on the tongues of those interested. His mother and sister supported Johnny in this great tribulation, the first with dignity, the second with virulence. But after the early rages and intemperate paroxysms, in which Jane eagerly shared, she found that Johnny was cooling in his rage; and such are the resources of human comedy that anon her brother actually reproved Jane for some particularly poignant sentiments on the subject of Dinah. Presently, to the bewilderment of Jane, who was young and without experience of disappointment, John began to calm down. He roughly shut up the



girl after some poisonous criticism of Dinah, and a sort of alliance into which brother and sister had slipped, and into which she entered with full force of love for John and hate for Dinah, threatened to terminate.

It remained for another man to explain what seemed to her a mystery. He was not a very far-seeing or competent person, but he had reached to the right understanding of Johnny's present emotion.

With Jerry Withycombe Jane fell in beside a track through the forest, where he was erecting a woodstack, and since their relations were of the friendliest, Jane had no secrets from him and spoke of her affairs.

"What's come to them Lord knows," she said. "Mother's at father behind the scenes. You'd think Dinah wouldn't have had the face to bide in the house a day after that wickedness; but there she is—the devil."

"It's your father," answered Jerry. "My sister was telling about it. Melindy says that Mr. Bamsey's troubled a lot, and though he knows Dinah has got to go, he's taking it upon himself to decide about where she shall go."

"I see through that," said Jane. "Father only cares for Dinah really, and he thinks that, given time, things may calm down and her be forgiven. That's his cowardly view, so as he shall keep her. But nobody shan't calm down if I can help it. A woman can hate a lot better than a man. Why, even Johnny—you'd almost think he's cooling a bit if it was possible."

"He is," answered Jerry. "And why not? What the hell's the good of keeping at boiling point over what can't be helped? Especially if,

on second thoughts, you begin to reckon it can be helped."

"What d'you mean by that?" asked Jane.

"Why, you see John's a very determined sort of customer. He's never took 'no' for an answer from anybody, and he's got an idea that a man's will is stronger than a woman's. Not two days ago I met Johnny, and he said where there was life there was hope."

Jane gasped.

"That's what made him stop me when I was telling the truth about her?"

Jerry nodded.

"Very likely. In fact, he ain't down and out yet—in his own view, anyway. I believe John be coming round to the opinion that Dinah may yet live to see she was wrong."

Jane stared and her thoughts reeled.

"D'you mean to tell me that a man could sink to think again of a girl that had jilted him?" she flamed.

"Don't you turn on me," protested Jerry.

"It ain't my fault men are like that. A man in love will stand untold horrors from a woman."

"It's a beastly thought—a beastly thought!" cried Jane. "But he shan't—he never shall have her now if I can prevent it."

Jerry saw danger in this attitude.

"For God's love, Jenny, don't you go poking into it. Men in love be parlous items, and if he's still that way, though wounded, then 'tis like a wild tiger a man have fired at and only hurt. He's awful dangerous now, I shouldn't wonder; and if he wants her still and counts to get her, God help anybody who came between. He'd break your neck if you tried to: that I will swear."

But Jerry was more perturbed at the vision he had conjured than Jane. For his information she was able to give facts concerning the other side.

"If that's what John's after, he's only asking for more misery, then," she said. "I hope you're wrong, Jerry, for I should never feel the same to John if I thought he could sink to it; but anyway he needn't fox himself that she'll ever go back on it again. Cunning as she is, I can be more cunning than her, and I'll swear she's got somebody else up her sleeve."

"Who, then?" asked Jerry Withycombe.

"I can't tell you—not yet. But I'll catch her presently."

"We all know you don't like her; and more don't I, because you don't," answered Jerry. "But if you are positive sure she'll never come round to Johnny again, it might be truest kindness to tell him so."

"What mother and me want is for her to get out of the house, so as we can breathe again," answered the girl. "It's up to father, and father's going to have a bad time if he stands against us."

But a few evenings after this meeting the situation was defined for the benefit of Jane and her mother, and, with Dinah out of the way at Ponsworthy, her foster-father endeavoured to ameliorate the strain. He had confided his difficulties to Arthur Chaffe and been counselled to speak plainly. Indeed, at his wish, the carpenter joined his circle and supported him.

Mr. Bamsey tried to conceal the fact that Arthur had come to help him, for his friend not seldom dropped in to supper; but on this occa-

sion Faith felt aware of an approaching challenge, and was not surprised when, after the evening meal, her husband led the conversation to Dinah Waycott.

"Arthur's my second self," he said, "and I know he'll lift no objection to listening, even if he don't see with our eyes."

"You needn't say 'our eyes,' father," replied Jane, quick to respond. "Me and mother——"

But her mother stopped her.

"Listen, and don't talk till you're axed to," she said.

"Give heed to me," began Ben. "There's been growing up a lot of fog here, and what I want to do is to clear it off this instant moment, now while Orphan Dinah's out of the way. We stand like this. When she threw over Johnny, because she found she couldn't love him in a way to wed him, John ordered her out of Lower Town. Well, who shall blame him? 'Tweren't vitty they should clash. She was instant for going, and though you think I withheld her from doing so, that ain't fair to me."

"You do withhold her, father," said Faith Bamsey quietly.

"No, I do not. I come to the subject of Dinah from a point you can't grasp. For why? She was left to me by my dead first as a sacred and solemn trust. I grant I'm very fond of her, and I grant what she's done haven't shook my feelings, because, unlike you, mother, I believe she's done right. My heart's bled for my own—for your great trouble and for John's. Nothing sadder could have come to shake John's faith, and for a time I was fearful for John. The devil always finds the appointed hour when a soul's weakest.

We all know that; and you remember it, Jane. But John has justified his up-bringing; and the mother in him is bringing him back to his true self. So that leaves Dinah. Her wish and will is to be gone. She's seeking a proper and fitting place—neither too low nor too high. She'd go into service to-morrow—anywhere; but I won't have that."

"And why for not, father?" asked Mrs. Bamsey; "your first was in service once."

"That's different," he answered. "You must see it, mother. You must remember my duty to my first. Would Jane go into service?"

"No, I would not," answered Jane; "not for anybody. I'd go on the street first."

Mr. Chaffe was shocked.

"Do I hear you, Jane?" he asked.

"God forgive you, Jane," said her father; then he proceeded.

"My foster-daughter is a much more delicate question than my own daughter; and mother, with her sharp understanding, knows it. From no love for Dinah I say so. I'm not standing here for my own sake, or for any selfishness. I've long been schooled to know she was going, and if anybody's fretting about her biding here, it's Dinah's self. But the work she must go to has not yet been found in my opinion. Her future hangs upon it and I must be obeyed in that matter."

"She's turned down such a lot of things," said Jane.

"She has not," replied Mr. Bamsey. "She'd do anything and take anything to-morrow. She was at me to let her go for barmaid to the Blue Lion at Totnes. And I said, 'No, Dinah; you

shan't go nowhere as barmaid while I live.' And I say it again, meaning no disrespect to the Blue Lion, which is a very good licensed house."

"If she was in earnest, she could have gone, whether you liked it or not," said Jane.

Mr. Bamsey grew a little flushed and regarded his daughter without affection.

"You would—not Dinah," he answered. "Dinah looks to me as her father, and she won't do nothing I don't hold with, or take any step contrary to my view."

"And what is your view, father?" asked Mrs. Bamsey.

"I want for Dinah to go into a nice family, where the people will receive her as one of themselves, and treat her as the child of a man in my position have a right to be treated."

"You won't find no such place, father," said Jane.

"I hope we shall. She's out to Ponsworthy with Mrs. Bassett to-day; and the Bassetts are God-fearing people in our own station of life."

"If she was to go there, she'd only be nursemaid to four young children," declared Faith.

"Then, if that's all there is to it, she won't go there," answered Ben.

"And what if nothing to suit your opinions can be found, father?" asked his wife.

"Then—then she'll be forced to stop here, I'm afraid, my dear."

"And what if I said I wouldn't if she did?" flashed out Jane.

"There's some questions beneath answering, Jane, and that's one of them," replied Mr. Bamsey.

In the pause that followed, Mr. Chaffe, who

had been smoking in the chimney corner of the house-place where they sat, addressed the family.

Jane, however, did not stop to listen. She began to remove the supper things and came and went.

"Ben's so right as he can be in my opinion, Faith," said Arthur. "He founds what he says upon the fact that Dinah has done the proper thing to give John up; and if you could only see that, you'd admit she was not to be punished for what she done. Dinah ain't the first that thought she was in love when she wasn't. There's some would have gone on with it and married Johnny just the same; but in my judgment a girl who can marry a man she doesn't love be little better than a scarlet woman."

Faith Bamsey listened quietly.

"I've pretty well come to that myself, Arthur," she said. "I may say I go that far now. And so not a word more against her. She's a saint and worthy of all praise, and I dare say we ought to kiss her feet. But what next? That's all I humbly want to know? Ben, you see, is very jealous indeed for Dinah; but, on the other side, I like John to be free to come and go from his mother's home; and you won't say that's unnatural. But while she's here, angel though she may be, come John can't; and that's not unnatural either."

She smouldered bitterly under her level speech and self-control.

"All good—all good," declared Mr. Chaffe. "And if I may speak for Ben, I should say he grasps the point as firm as you do, Faith. In fact the more he cared for Dinah, the more he would see she must go out into the world now, for the sake of all parties."

"This very night," said Ben, "Dinah may come back in sight of work at Ponsworthy."

"There remains John," continued Mr. Chaffe, "and John's gone through the fire very brave indeed by all accounts, without a crack. His turn will come. The Lord tempers the wind to the shorn lamb, and no doubt his future mate will be along in due course for his comfort and uplifting."

Dinah returned a few minutes later, and she expressed a desire to go to Ponsworthy; but Mrs. Bamsey's prediction was correct: her work with the Bassetts must be that of a nurse and no more.

"Providence haven't spoke yet, then," said Mr. Bamsey.

Mr. Chaffe presently went home. But for all his smooth speeches, none knew better that the fret could never end while Dinah remained at Green Hayes.

"If nought's done, in less than no time, she'll make a bolt," he reflected. "She's that sort of woman; and for all us can say, it may be the will of Providence to cut the knot in that manner."

Yet he was so impressed with this dark possibility that he decided to see Dinah at the first opportunity and warn her against it.

"A very curious, puzzling thing," thought Mr. Chaffe, "that the price for well-doing be often stiffer than the price for bad. But the good man should keep in mind that the credit side be growing for all he suffers. If we can't trust the recording angel's book-keeping, who should we trust?"

He passed a neighbour in the darkness going home and published his reflection.

"Be that you, Nicholas Caunter? So it is, then.

And here, on my way, I was filled with a great thought, Nicholas."

Mr. Caunter—a hedge tacker of low repute—had drunk too much beer.

"A oner for thoughts you be, Mr. Chaffe," he said.

"Yes—they come; and it just flashed over my mind, Nicholas, that goodness breeds life and a good deed can't perish out of the land; but the payment of evil is death—sure and certain."

"Only if you done murder," said Mr. Caunter.

"Pass on, Nicholas, pass on. The thought be too deep for your order of mind, I'm afraid," replied the older man.

CHAPTER XIII

JOE ON ECONOMICS

ON A JUNE EVENING Lawrence Maynard fell in with Dinah at Buckland, near the cottage of the old huntsman. Accident was responsible for their meeting, and they had not seen each other since the girl's engagement was at an end. Now the cowman went on his way to spend an evening with Enoch Withycombe, while Dinah intended to visit Falcon Farm and beg Susan and Mr. Stockman to interest themselves on her account.

"I can't get anything to do that will please foster-father," she said. "He's so hard to please where I'm concerned."

"I dare say he is."

"Where's your black armlet what you wore for your dead master in Somerset?" she asked.

"I've left it off now with these new clothes."

She nodded.

"I'm going to see Cousin Joe and Susan. She's always been terrible kind to me. So has he, for that matter. How have they took this?"

"They've heard John's side mostly. But they keep open minds."

"They don't know why I done it?"

"Yes. No business of mine; but I just went

so far as to explain that I'd seen you last Bank Holiday, and you told me what you thought to do, and why."

"Thank you, I'm sure."

"Common fairness. Mr. Stockman's very good to me and lets me talk if I've a mind to."

"They won't jump down my throat, then?"

"Not likely. I'm going in to have a tell with Mr. Withycombe now."

"What did he think about it, Mr. Maynard?"

"He thought you was right, I believe."

"I'm very glad of that. And what did you think?"

"You know what I thought. I thought you was dead right."

She kept silent for a moment. Then she spoke.

"I wish to God Johnny would see it."

"He will—some day. He don't yet. They think at Falcon Farm that, if Johnny is patient, things may yet come right."

Dinah was cast down.

"Oh, I'm sorry they talk like that. Why do they?"

"Because they've seen him and not you, perhaps."

"If there's any feeling like that about, it's only right they should know."

They talked for another ten minutes. Then she prepared to go up the hill.

"You've done me good," she said, "and I'm very glad I met you. And I'd like to meet you again, please. D'you mind that walk I wanted to go? Will you take it now?"

"It's like this, Miss Waycott. If there's a ghost of a chance that you go back to Johnny

Bamsey, then I'd rather not. So if you're in doubt—even a hair's breadth—we'd better wait."

"I'm not in doubt. I wouldn't have given myself all the hateful grief of doing it, nor yet him, if I hadn't made up my mind."

"Then I'll be very pleased to take a walk any Sunday if you've a mind to."

"Sunday week, then, if I don't find work before. I'll meet you—where?"

He considered.

"If we're going to Hey Tor Rock, it's a long way for you anyhow."

"How if I was to come to dinner at Falcon Farm first?" she asked, and he approved the suggestion.

"A very good thought, then we can start from there."

"Sure you don't mind?"

"Proud."

They departed then, and Dinah, cheered by the incident of this meeting, went on her way.

She liked Maynard, not for himself, but his attitude to life. Yet, had he been other than himself, she had probably not found him interesting. He was always the same—polite and delicate-minded. Such qualities in an elderly man had left her indifferent; but, as she once said to him, the young turn to the young. Maynard was still young enough to understand youth, and it seemed to Dinah that he understood her very well. She was grateful to him for promising to take the walk.

When she reached the farm on the hill, Joe Stockman and Thomas Palk had been for an hour in conversation. It was an evening when Joe had offered his horseman a 'spot of whisky' from

his own bottle and Thomas, accepting it, had cautiously entered upon a little matter for some time in his mind.

Susan sat at the table mending her father's socks, while the men were by the hearth, for the kitchen fire never went out at Falcon Farm, and Joe always found it agreeable after sun-down, even in high summer.

Mr. Palk crept to his theme with great strategy. He spoke of the price of commodities in general, and the difficulties that confronted even a bachelor with a good home and satisfactory work.

"The thought of a new black coat do make you tremble nowadays," he said.

"Then put the thought away from you, Thomas," advised Mr. Stockman. "I'm often wishful for little comforts myself, as is natural at my time of life; but I say to myself, 'The times are hard and these ban't days to set an example of selfishness.' The times are lean, Thomas, and we've got to practise the vartue of going without—high and low alike."

"Everybody knows one thing: that everybody else did ought to be working harder," said Susan.

"True for you, Soosie-Toosie. 'Tis all very well for Thomas here to say the prices be cruel; but the question is, 'Why are they?' And I'll tell you for why. Labour says Capital ought to give more; and Capital says Labour ought to work harder; and so they both stand chattering at each other like magpies and saying the country's going to the devil. You don't find the professional people grizzling and whining for more money—doctors and lawyers and such like."

"No," said Thomas, "because their job pays

and they fetch in the cash and have enough to put by. I'd be so cheerful as them if I could make so much. I'd work like hell pulling mangel if I could get half as much by it as a dentist do pulling teeth. And the great puzzle to me is why for should pulling teeth be worth a fortune and pulling mangel deny me a new Sunday coat?"

"Never heard you to say such a foolish thing afore, Thomas," answered Joe. "My dear man, you voice the whole silly staple of Labour when you say that. A thing is only worth what it will fetch, and the root of our trouble at this minute is because Labour is forcing Capital to pay it more than it did ought to fetch."

"Labour's worth what it can get," ventured Susan, and her father rebuked her.

"A very wicked thought, and I'm sorry you can sink to it," he said. "It's that opinion and a weak Government that's ruining the kingdom. Look at it, Thomas. Here's a man has three pounds a week for doing what a boy of fifteen could do as well. That's false economy to begin with, because that man can't honestly earn three golden pounds in a week. He haven't got the parts to do it. And if millions of men are getting more than they can earn, what's happening?"

"They must have the money to live," said Thomas.

"For the moment they must," admitted his master, "and they're getting it, but where half their time be wasted is in wrangling over keeping it. The fools won't work, because they're afraid of their lives if they do, their wages will come down; and they don't see, so kitten-blind they are, that the very best thing that could happen to

them would be that their wages should come down. For what would that mean? It would mean things was returning to their true values, and that a pound was in sight of being worth twenty bob again."

"That's it," answered Thomas. "If three pound be worth only thirty shilling, they must have three pound."

"Listen to me, my son. Would you rather have three pound, worth thirty shilling, or two pound, worth forty? You'd rather have two worth forty; and when Labour sees that two worth forty be better than three worth thirty, then, very like, Labour will set to work to make two worth forty again. That's what their leading men know so well as me; but they dare not rub it into the rank and file, because 'twould ease Capital so well as Labour and they've no wish to do a stroke for Capital or the nation at large. And while the people be so busy fighting for money that they ain't got time to earn it, so long the English sovereign will have to wait to come into its own."

"You speak for Capital, however," murmured Mr. Palk. "I can't withstand 'e, of course, because I haven't been eggicated; but——"

"I speak for Labour quite so much as for Capital," declared Mr. Stockman. "I began life as a labouring boy and I'm a labouring man still, as you can vouch for. I'm only telling Labour, what it don't know and won't learn, that if it worked harder and jawed less, it would be putting money in its pocket. As things are, it's a child yowling for the moon."

"Then I suppose I be," said Thomas, "for I was going to put it to you, man to man, that it

would be a Godsend to me if you could lift me five bob, or even three."

Soosie-Toosie cast a frightened glance at Mr. Palk and another at her father; but Joe was smiling.

"More money—eh? Now that's a great thought, Thomas—a very great thought. Fancy! And why for, Thomas, if I may ask without making a hole in my manners?"

"For my dead sister's boy," said Mr. Palk. "There's no money, because his father's out of work, and I'm very wishful to lend a hand on his account."

"And very creditable to you, Thomas; and how comes it his lawful father's out of work?"

It was at this moment, to the joy of Susan, that Dinah knocked at the door. She leapt up and thankfully brought the visitor back with her.

Mr. Stockman, too, was pleased.

"Company, Thomas," he said. "We'll take this subject up at another time. Don't think I'll forget it. Dinah, I see—and why not? You'll always find friends here, Orphan Dinah."

Thomas emptied his glass and disappeared, while Dinah plunged into the first object of her visit.

"I'm glad you haven't throwed me over for what I've done," she said.

"Far from it," replied Mr. Stockman.

"We're only terrible sorry for all parties, Dinah," said Susan; "and we hope it will come smooth again."

"So do I," answered the younger; "but not the way you mean, Soosie."

She went over old ground and made it clear that none must expect her to go back.

"I hope I'll live to see John happily wedded," she said. "And I never shan't be happy, I reckon, till he is."

"And what about you?" asked Joe. "What's the truth, Dinah?"

"I'm like Soosie," she said. "Us be the sort that's happier single."

But Miss Stockman laughed.

"You're a good few years too young to tell like that, Dinah. You'm born to be married to the right one."

Dinah, however, shook her head.

"A mistake like what I've made be a very shattering thing," she said. "I wouldn't have the nerve to go into it no more. There's a lot of unmarried women wanted to carry on the work of the world nowadays."

"And always was," declared Joe. "The deepest minded sort, such as Susan, don't marry; and even them that do wed put it off a good bit, because they see in their wisdom it's better to be the mother of two than ten. A time is coming when a man with ten children will be a disgrace. There was a time when a labouring man bred like a rabbit, in hopes that his dutiful childer would keep him out of the workhouse at the end; but that time's past. The women begin to see that child-bearing ain't the only use for 'em."

They promised her to remember her need for work, and Joe undertook to see a friend or two at Ashburton who might be able to find it. Then, thanking them very heartily, she asked a question.

"May I come to dinner Sunday week?"

They approved, and Joe hoped by that time he might be able to report progress.

"I've got another reason," she explained. "Mr.

Maynard is a very understanding man, and he's promised to go for a walk and show me a stone on the moor I'm wishful to see."

Susan was interested.

"Lor', Dinah!" she said.

Mr. Stockman appeared to be buried in thought for a moment.

"Did he ask you, or did you ask him, to go for a walk, Orphan Dinah?" he inquired.

"I asked him. I asked him a long time back and he wouldn't go, because he reckoned Johnny wouldn't like it. But I wanted to see the stone, so I asked him again, and he's got no objection—not now."

"He's a very sensible man," declared Joe; "a more sensible man for his years I haven't met."

"Would you have any objection, Cousin Joe?" asked Dinah.

"I wish John could have been of the party, I'm sure; but since that's off for all time, then there's nothing wrong in your taking a walk with Maynard. Nor would there be any harm in any case. I know all about Maynard."

"He's a very seeing man," said Dinah, "and he thinks a lot of you, Cousin Joe."

"And why not?"

Dinah drank a cup of milk and presently set out to walk home. Susan admired her courage.

"Nothing daunts you," she said. "I wouldn't go down through the woods in the night by myself for the world."

"Night's got no more to it than day," declared the other. "I like it—specially when you have trouble on your mind."

CHAPTER XIV

THE FACE ON THE ROCK

THE DAY CAME for Dinah's walk with Lawrence Maynard, and though the sky lowered at dawn, before noon the wind had travelled north of west and there was no longer any fear of rain.

They set out, climbed the Beacon, and advanced by those rolling stretches of heath and stone that extend to the north of it.

They talked but little on their way, reached the White Gate, held to the winding road a while, then returned to the moors, and presently stood looking down into the deserted quarries of Hey Tor.

"I'll show you the face on the rock when we turn," he said. "I wanted you to see this first. A very interesting place."

They sat and looked into the quarry. The weathered spot was hung with ferns and heath. Deep, green pools lay in the bottom of it, and a ring-ousel sat and sang his elfin song, perched on a rusty fragment of iron, driven into the granite by men long since in their graves.

"This was my playground when I was a child," said Lawrence, to the surprise of the listener.

"I thought you was a foreigner," she said.

"No. I was born a mile from here. The

cottage where I lived with my family is a ruin now—I'll show it to you—and me and a little sister used to play on the heath and make our games. They're all gone except that sister. She married and went to Australia. The rest are dead."

"You'm a lonely man, then?"

"Used to it. It's only my childhood that the face on the rock comes into, and this deserted quarry. I met a gentleman here once who told me all about the place. And his talk put great thoughts in my head, for I was thirteen by then and full of ideas already. I got 'em from my mother. She was better bred and born than father and wishful to see me higher than a labourer some day."

Dinah threw herself into his narrative.

"To think of that," she said. "How terrible interesting everybody is, the moment you begin to know the least bit about 'em!"

"I suppose they are. The gentleman told me that a lot of the stone cut out from this place is in London now. London Bridge be made of it, and part of the British Museum too. And I never forgot that. I envied those stones, because it seemed to me it would be better to be a bit of London Bridge than what I was."

"What a queer thought," murmured Dinah.

"'Tis a queer thought, but true, that there's plenty of dead stones doing better work in the world than plenty of live men. I used to dream like that when I was a nipper, but I soon had to earn my living, and then there was an end of dreams."

"You'd like to be doing something better than milking cows, perhaps?"

"Not now. I had ideas, but life knocked 'em out of me."

"You talk as if you was old."

"The heart knows its own bitterness, and a head like mine knows its own weakness," said Lawrence. "Things happened to change my outlook and make me think. Then I found I'd got a poor set of brains. I'd just got brains enough to know I was a long way nearer a fool than lots of other men; and I'd just got eyes to see the gulf between."

"You must be a pretty clever sort of chap to think such things at all," answered Dinah.

"For a long time I was a chap overcome by life," confessed Maynard. "Things fell out that properly dazed me. It's much the same with John Bamsey at this minute. While all went smooth, he never saw much beyond the point of his own nose, and never wanted to; then came trouble, and we'll hope it will make his mind bigger when the smart dies. Anyway, life made me take larger views for a bit. Then with time I settled down again, same as I am now."

"Contented?"

"As near content as I'm ever likely to get. I said to myself, 'Since you can't have what you wanted, have nothing.' And I have nothing."

"That cuts both ways, I reckon," declared Dinah; "you escape a lot of bother, but you lose a good few things that make life better, don't you?"

"To cut a loss is a very wise deed," he answered. "So it seemed to me anyhow. Now let me show you where I was born, if you're not tired."

Presently, in the valley far beneath these downs, where the hillside fell to the north and a stream

ran in the bottom of a woody coomb, Maynard pointed to a little building. It stood where the land began to ascend again and climb to those rugged piles of granite known as Hound Tor Rocks.

"D'you see that ruin alongside the green croft beside the edge of the woods? That was a fair-sized cottage twenty years ago. My father worked at Hedge Barton near by, and we lived there till he died."

Dinah regarded the spot with interest.

"To think of that," she said.

"My playmate was my sister Milly," continued Lawrence. "We were the eldest, and after us came two girls, who both died. Then my mother was with child again, and that brings me to the face on the rock, what you want to hear about."

Dinah, as her custom was, had flung herself entirely into these interests of another being. At this moment nothing on earth seemed more important and desirable to know than these passages from the boyhood of Lawrence Maynard.

"Such things bring you home to my mind," she said. "Now I'll have a better idea about you; and then you'll be more interesting."

He laughed at that.

"Now we'll take Hey Tor Rock on our way back. It'll throw a bit of light on one or two things you've asked me."

They approached the granite bosses of the tor and stood presently beside it, where high on the cliff above them a face bulked enormous and stared into the eye of the westering sun.

The chisels of Nature carve slowly on granite, but once a masterpiece has been wrought, it will outlast many generations of mankind. Such

things chance out of slow mouldings, or by sudden strokes. They may be the work of centuries, or the inspiration of a moment—plastic, moulded by patient Time, as the artist models his clay; or glyphic—struck with a blow of lightning, or earthquake, from the stone.

The great rock idols come and go, and haunt lonely cliffs, crown lonely heights, gaze out upon the surges of lonely seas. To Nature these whimsical figures, near enough to man to challenge him, are but faces in the fire, peeping to-day from the flux, and cinders again to-morrow; but, to the short-lived thing they imitate, they endure, while his own generations lapse.

This giant's head was smaller than the Sphinx and of an antiquity more profound. The countenance lacked majesty, and was indeed malignant—not with the demoniac intelligence of man-cut fiends, such as 'Le Stryge' on Notre Dame, but rather with the brutish semi-human doubt and uncertainty of a higher ape. So the Minotaur might have scowled to seaward. The expression of the monster trembled on the verge of consciousness; it suggested one of those vanished beings created near the end of our hundred thousand years' journey, after man's ancestors descending from the trees set forth on the mighty march to conscious intelligence.

The face belonged to the forefathers of the neolithic people: it burlesqued hugely those beetle-browed, prognathous paleoliths of old time, and for them, perchance, possessed an awe and sublimity we cannot grant it to-day.

But it had challenged a boy and girl, who were still many thousands of years nearer to prehistoric ancestors than their parents. For children

still move through the morning of days, and through their minds the skin-clad dreamers and stone men are again reflected and survive.

Now Dinah heard with what force the discovery of the granite Titan had struck upon the boy and girl.

"A new baby was coming," said Lawrence, "and sister and me were each given a bit of food and told to run out on the moor and play till nightfall. And then I suddenly found yonder face and shouted to Milly and made her see it too. It excited me a lot, and Milly always got excited when I did. She said 'twas like father, but I said, 'No, 'tis a lot grander and finer than father.' Then she was frightened and wanted to run away; but I wouldn't have that. I took pleasure in giving great powers to the monster, and wondered if he was good or wicked. And little sister thought he must be wicked, but I didn't see why he should be. 'Perhaps he's a good 'un,' I said; and then I decided that he might be good. Milly was for sloking off again, but my child's wits worked, and I very soon lifted up the stone into a great powerful creature. 'Us'll say our prayers to him,' I told Milly, but she feared that also. 'I never heard of nobody saying no prayers except to Gentle Jesus,' answered Milly to me. 'The Bible's full of 'em,' I told her. 'How would it be if we offered to be his friends?'"

"Tempted your little sister to turn heathen!" exclaimed Dinah.

"Yes, and she soon fell. I minded her how we had once prayed with all our might to Gentle Jesus to kill father, because he wouldn't take us to a circus. 'Gentle Jesus have got His Hands full without us,' I said to Milly.

‘He haven’t got no time to think about two little squirts like us. But this here great creature might be a good friend to us; and nobody the wiser!’”

“You was a crafty little boy.”

“No craft, only a twist of the brain. I smile sometimes, looking back, to see what thoughts I’d gotten. But a child’s thoughts die like flowers. We can never think ’em again when we grow up. Milly held out a bit, yet she never withstood me very long. She was only afraid that Gentle Jesus would punish us; but I said, ‘Not Him. If harm comes, I’ll take the blame.’ We thought then what we should pray for, and Milly had a bright idea. ‘Ax him to make the new baby a boy,’ she advised, and I agreed, for we was very wishful to have a boy home, and so was our mother. Then Milly had another thought. ‘What be us to call him?’ she asked me. ‘Something terrible fearful,’ I said—‘the fearfulest thing we can think upon.’ We strove after the most dreadful words we knew, and they were our father’s swear-words. ‘Let’s call him “Bloody,”’ I said; and Milly thought we ought to say ‘Mr. Bloody.’ But I told her ‘Mister’ was a name for a gentleman. ‘We’ll call him “Bloody” and chance it,’ I said; and so we did. I prayed to the stone then. I said, ‘Dear Bloody, please let mother’s new babby be a boy. Amen’; and Milly done the same; and when we got home in the dimpsy light, all was over and father eating for the first time that day. There had come a little boy and mother was happy. Milly whispered to me, ‘That’s one for him!’”

Dinah laughed with delight.

“I’ll mind that story so long as I live,” she

said, gazing up at the iron-black impassive features above her.

"That's not all, though. We got terrible friendly with our great idol, and then, a week later, the baby fell ill and seemed like to die. For the nurse that waited on mother had come from whooping-cough and the poor child caught it afore he was five days old. We were in a terrible upstore about that, and I minded this rock; and when a day came and the little one was at his last gasp, me and Milly went up and stood here, where we sit now, and prayed to the rock for our brother. And then we went home a lot comforted—to find the baby was dead."

He broke off, and the listener expressed sorrow.

"You poor little things—to think of you trotting back together—to that! I could cry for 'e now."

"We cried for ourselves, I warrant you. We was terrible upset about it. Savage I was, and loved to hear father damn to hell the nurse that had done the mischief. 'Douglas Champernowne' the poor child was called. My mother doted on high-sounding names. And the day after he was buried, my sister and me roamed on the Moor again, bewailing our loss; and it was Milly that called my mind to our stone god, for I'd forgot all about him just then. 'There he is—aglaring and agrinning!' she said, and I looked up and saw we'd come to him without thinking. It had been raining all day, and his face was wet and agleam in evening sunlight. We liked him that way, but now I turned my hate on him and cursed him. 'Beast—hookem-snivey beast!' I yelled up at the tor; 'and I wish to God I was strong enough to pull you down and smash your

face in!' Milly trembled with fear and put her arms around me, to save me, or die with me if need be. But I told her the idol couldn't hurt us. 'He can only kill babbies,' I yelled at him. Then I worked myself up into a proper passion and flung stones and mud at the rock, and Milly, finding our god helpless, egged me on. We made faces and did everything our wits could hit on to insult him. Then, tired out, we turned our backs on him, and the last he heard was my little sister giving him the nastiest cut of all. 'We be going back to Gentle Jesus now,' screamed Milly."

Maynard ceased and lighted his pipe.

"It's a sad, queer story. I don't wonder you come and have a look at the face sometimes. So shall I now. May I tell it again?" asked Dinah.

"No, don't do that—I'd rather none heard it for the present. I've my reasons for not wishing to be linked up with these parts."

"Call me 'Dinah,' and let me call you 'Lawrence,'" she said. From her this was not a startling suggestion. Indeed she had already called him 'Lawrence' sometimes.

"If you like," he answered. "It's easier. We see a good many things the same."

"I suppose we do. And did you and Milly go back to 'Gentle Jesus'?"

"Certainly we did; and I'll make bold to say she never left Him no more."

"But you—you ain't exactly a Christian man, are you?"

He looked into the past and did not answer for a moment.

"I don't know," he said at last. "It's hard to

tell sometimes when we change. Things happen to shake a man out of his hope and trust."

"A sad thought," she said.

"It's always sad to see a thing fall down—whether it's a god or a tree. The sound of the woodman's axe be sad to some minds."

"It is to me," said Dinah.

He looked up at the features above them, carved on the mass of the tor. Beyond swung out Rippon's granite crown against the sky, and nearer stretched miles of wild and ragged heath. The sun kneaded earth with its waning lustres until matter seemed imponderable and the wild land rolled in planes of immaterial radiance folding upon each other. The great passages of the hills and dales melted together and the stony foreground shone clear, where, through the hazes, a pool glinted among the lengthening shadows and reflected the sky. As the sun descended, tracts of misty purple spread in the hollows and flung smooth carpets for the feet of night.

Dinah put out her hand to the man.

"Don't you fling over God," she said very earnestly.

"I hope never," he answered.

After they had talked a while longer he looked at his watch.

"Half after seven," he exclaimed.

They set off for home and she asked for another tale.

"Tell me what happened to you when you went out into the world," she begged; but this he would not do.

"You've heard enough about me, I reckon. Speak of yourself a bit."

She obeyed and described her life in child-

hood, while he listened to the simple story, interested enough.

He reminded her of his desire as their walk ended and they reached the door of Falcon Farm.

"Don't say nothing of my past or tell the tale of the rock again, Dinah. I'm not wishful for the people to know anything about me."

She promised.

"I can keep secrets," she assured him.

CHAPTER XV

BEN BAMSEY'S DOUBTS

AS THE SUMMER ADVANCED, Jane Bamsey let it be known that she proposed to wed Enoch Withycombe's son, Jerry. For some time her parents refused to believe it, but as Jane persisted and brought Jerry to see them, they began to accept the fact. Benjamin felt hopeful, while Jane's mother did not. Jerry was only a woodman and would always remain a woodman. Mrs. Bamsey held that a daughter of hers should have looked higher.

Jane, however, did not share her mother's estimate, but perceived possibilities and believed that, with her help and supported by the dowry she expected to bring him on their marriage, Jerry would prove—not her head, but her right hand. For Jane had her own private ambitions, and, though they staggered Jerry when he heard them, their absurdity was not as yet apparent to him. They embraced a radical change in his own existence that had been unbearable to contemplate save in one light. But that light his sweetheart created; and when she described her ambitions to leave Dart Vale and keep a shop in a town, Jerry, after some wondering protests, found that the choice might actually lie between

this enterprise and Jane herself. Therefore he did not hesitate. He stated his case, however.

"Away from trees, I'm much afraid I should be but a lost man," declared Jerry.

"And in the country, I'm but a lost woman," replied Jane. "I'm sick of trees, and fields too."

How far Jane might be looking ahead, neither her future husband nor anybody else knew; but one guessed; and since it was Enoch Withycombe who received this spark of divination, he kept it to himself for the present. Now the invalid spoke to Jane's father, who came to see him upon the subject; but both old men considered the situation without knowledge of the facts, because Jane had counselled Jerry, indeed commanded him, to say nothing of their future intentions until the marriage day was fixed.

"And how's yourself, Enoch?" asked Benjamin, as he smiled and took Mr. Withycombe's hand.

"Middling, but slipping down, Ben. The end's getting nearer and the bad days getting thicker sprinkled in the pudding. I shan't be sorry to go."

"Well, well, if you ban't, there's a cruel lot will be when you do," said Mr. Bamsey. "And often and often I catch myself asking if the dead do really go at all. Married to Faith, as I am, I can't help but feel we've got a cloud of witnesses round about. She see widow Nosworthy last week, down by the stile in 'five acre,' where there's a right of way. She was standing there, just like she used to stand time without count waiting for her drunken son of a night, to steer him past the pond to his home."

Mr. Withycombe showed a little impatience.

"'Tis no good prattling about ghosts to a man who'll damn soon be one himself," he said. "As you very well know I don't believe in 'em, Ben; and if us understood better, we'd be able to prove, no doubt, that your wife don't see nothing at all, and that the ghosts be in her own mind's eye and nowhere else. And if another life there is, then you can't suppose that everybody's on his own there, to moon about where they please, with no law and order. When the men and women go out of this world, they've done with this world, and I never will believe they be allowed back, to waste our time and fright the silly ones."

"Leave it," said Ben. "I go largely along with you, and my wife herself thinks no more of it than her power to make butter."

"How's your boy?"

"Got a lot more silenter than he was. Comes and goes; and he's civil to Dinah now, but don't see her alone. Us be a bit hopefuller about him."

"Leave him, then. You want to talk of this here match between my Jerry and your Jane."

"I do. I'm very wishful to hear you speak out on the subject, Enoch. True love they've gotten for each other, though I wish they was nearer of an age."

"What does Faith Bamsey say?"

"To be honest, we don't see eye to eye."

"I'll tell you what she says, Ben. It's a come-down for her Jane to marry Jerry. I grant that. I've told Jerry so too."

"Perfect love casteth out any such thought," said Mr. Bamsey.

"It may cast it out, but it will come back. In some girls it wouldn't. In Jane it will. Jane's on powerful good terms with herself, as you'll grant."

"You don't like her," said Mr. Bamsey.

"I do not; and she don't like me."

Ben was silent.

"She came up to tea Sunday, and I seed 'em side by side. She's sly and she's making Jerry sly. How the devil she's larned such an open sort of creature as Jerry to keep secrets I don't know. But secrets they've got. I don't think Jane is a very likely pattern of wife."

"She's young and there's bright points to her. She wasn't saucy nor anything like that, I hope?"

"Oh no—butter wouldn't melt in her mouth."

"What does Melinda think about her?"

"Melinda thinks better of her than I do."

"That's to the good, then."

"Have you asked your girl where she plans to live?"

"We haven't raised that yet."

"I did, and she put me off. There's things hidden. What are you going to give her?"

"Five hundred pound, Enoch."

"Don't, Ben. Keep it against their future. That's a hugeous lot of money and Lord knows what she'd do with it."

"My only daughter must have a good start. It's none too much; she knows about it."

Mr. Withycombe considered.

"Then I'll tell you what she's doing, Ben. She's marrying for money! Yes, she is. Not Jerry's, because he won't have a penny till I die, and then he can only have one-third of the lot, which ain't much. But Jane's marrying for your money, and I'll lay my life she's going to spend it. They've no right to secrets if you're going to pay the piper and start 'em in that generous way."

"Secrets there didn't ought to be, I grant," said Benjamin. "But, mind you, I'm not allowing there are any. You may be mistook."

"Then find out where they be going to live and how Jane thinks to handle that dollop of cash," warned Mr. Withycombe. "And don't let Jane throw dust in your eyes. She's a tricky piece, like most of them beauties. I wish she'd took after the pattern of Orphan Dinah."

"So do I," admitted the other. "And I'd like to speak a word about Dinah, because there's some things you may know that I do not. I've been keeping her on along with me for two reasons. Firstly, because the right sort of place in my opinion don't offer."

"It never will," said Enoch. "Truth's truth, and the truth is you can't part from her."

"No, you mustn't say that. I'm thinking of her future, and I don't want her out where her future will be made dark and difficult. There's a lot to consider. And while I've been considering and withstanding Faith here and there, and Dinah also for that matter, there's drifted into my mind the second point about her. But I begin to feel doubtful, Enoch, whether it's very much use for us old people to worry our heads as we do about the young ones. This generation will go its own way."

"Pretty much as ours did before them, no doubt," answered the sick man. "We ancient folk love to bide in the middle of the picture so long as we can, and when I was a lot younger than now I often thought it rather a sad sight to see the old hanging on, and giving their opinions, and thinking anybody still cared a damn for what they said or thought."

"Yes, only the little children really believe in us," confessed Mr. Bamsey; "and that's why I say we squander a good bit of wisdom upon the rising race, for they'll go on rising, for good or evil, without much troubling their heads as to whether we approve or don't. But Dinah—she does heed me, and now there's come a shadow of a suspicion in my mind about another man for her. That's why I'm content to mark time a little and get hard words for doing it. Dinah herself don't know, I believe. But the name echoes along. In a word, what do you think of Maynard at Falcon Farm? You know him better than I do. He's rather a twilight sort of man you might say; but that's a way life have with some of the thinking sort. It turns 'em into their shells a bit."

"He's a kindly, well-meaning chap and old for his years," said Withycombe. "I should say he's not for a wife. We never talk about himself, nor yet myself. We tell about pretty high matters. He's got a mind, Ben."

Melinda Honeysett joined them at this moment and entered their conversation.

"He's got a mind, no doubt," said Mr. Bamsey. "But he's also got a body, and it would be unnatural in a young hearty man of his years if he'd never turned his thoughts to a home of his own."

Enoch spoke to his daughter.

"Here's Ben trying to hatch up a match for Dinah," he said.

"No, no—too wise, I'm sure," answered Melinda.

"Far too wise," declared the visitor. "But if such a thing was possible, it would cut a good many knots, Melindy."

"Dinah likes freedom now she's got it, I believe, and I wouldn't say she was too fond of children neither," answered Enoch's daughter.

"The love of childer be knit up with other things," declared Enoch.

"There's lots love childer as never had none, like myself," answered Melinda.

"True, my dear. There's lots love game as never shot it. But the snipe you brought down yourself be always the one that tastes best. A mother may love her own children, or she may not; but it depends often enough on the husband. Perfect love of childer did ought to begin with the perfect love of the man that got 'em. Take me. I had but three, but they were the apple of my wife's eye, because they was mine as well as hers."

"My brother Robert be coming home presently," said Melinda. "My sailor brother, Mr. Bamsey. How would you like him for Dinah? I'm sure she'd make a proper wife for him. He's like Jerry, only quicker in the uptake."

"Wouldn't like Dinah to marry a sailor man," confessed Ben. "I know Robert is a fine chap; but they've got a wife in every port. A sailor sees a lot more than the wonders of the deep."

Mr. Withycombe laughed.

"He ain't that sort, I promise you," he said.

"The point is, in strictest confidence, Melindy," explained Ben, "that I believe, though she scarce knows it herself, Dinah's interested in the Falcon Farm cowman. She's seen him off and on and, in my ear alone, speaks of the man. And your father here has nought but good to say of him."

"He's not for a wife, so Joe Stockman tells me. He was naming him a bit ago," answered Melinda, "and he said that the most comforting

thing about him, and Mr. Palk also, was that they were cut out for the bachelor state for evermore. Perhaps you'd best to name that to Dinah. Though, for my part, I should hope it would be years after her last adventure afore she ever dared to think upon a man again."

"No doubt; and yet—there it is. He seems to attract her."

Melinda was fond of Dinah, but had been exceedingly sorry for Johnny.

"Queer—sure enough," she said. "If Dinah, now, was to feel drawn to a man as hadn't any use for her, it would be fair justice in a manner of speaking, wouldn't it, Mr. Bamsey?"

"In a manner of speaking I dare say it might, Melindy," he admitted. "But I'll not hear Dinah tongue-handled over that no more."

"And another thing be certain," added Melinda. "Joe would feel terrible put about if he thought any such doings as that was in the wind."

So Mr. Bamsey went his way, as doubtful as when he came.

CHAPTER XVI

SUNDAY

JERRY AND HIS SWEETHEART wandered together along the lane from Buckland on an afternoon when Jane had been visiting the Withycombes. The sun beat down through the trees, and even in the shade it was too hot to tempt the lovers far.

"We'll climb up the Beacon a little ways and quott down in the fern," said Jerry, "and I'll smoke in your face and keep the flies off."

Jane, however, objected.

"I'm going to Hazel Tor, I reckon, and then to Cousin Joe's for tea. We'll meet John at Hazel Tor. Shall we tell him our secret plan, Jerry?"

"I don't care who knows it. If you feel there's no more need to hide up what we've ordained to do, then tell everybody."

"There's every need to hide up for that matter. Only Johnny's different from others. Me and Johnny are pretty close pals and always were. He won't mind us having a shop in a town. I've often told him I was set on the thought of a shop."

"The doubt will lie with me," said Jerry. "I know very well my father and Melindy and

everybody will say I ban't the sort of man to shine at a shop."

"There's shops and shops," answered Jane. "If we sold some things you'd be a lot more useful than if we sold others. But there's a lot of things I wouldn't care about selling."

They had already debated this matter many times, and never failed to find it attractive.

"There's certain goods ruled out, I know," he said. "You don't hold with butchering, nor yet a fish shop."

"I won't handle dead things," declared Jane. "It lies in my mind between three shops now. I've brought 'em down to three. There's a shop for children's toys, which I'd very much like; but you wouldn't be much use in that."

"I should not," admitted Jerry.

"Then," continued Jane, "there's a green-grocer's; and there's a great deal to be said for that, because we should have father behind us in a manner of speaking."

"Only if he comes round, Jenny. You grant yourself he'll little like to hear you be going to spend your capital on a shop."

"It might help him to come round if we took a green-grocer's. But I'm not saying I'd specially like a green-grocer's myself, because I shouldn't. 'Tis always a smelly place, and I hate smells."

"All shops have their smells," answered Jerry. "Even a linen draper's have a smell, though I couldn't describe it in words."

"They have," admitted she. "And the smell I'd like best to live in be tobacco. If I'd only got myself to think for, it would be a tobacco shop."

"My head spins when I think of it, however," confessed Jerry. "The one shop I see myself in is the green-grocer's, and only there for the cabbages and potatoes and such like."

Jane shook her head.

"As I'll be shopwoman most of the time, it's more important as I shall be suited than you."

"Certainly."

"There's more money moving among men than women: you must remember that too," continued Jane. "Men have bigger views and don't haggle over halfpennies like women. A green-grocer's be a terrible shop for haggling; but with tobacco and pipes and cigars, the price is marked once for all, and only men buy 'em, and the clever shopwomen often just turn the scales and sell the goods."

"I can see you incline your heart to tobacco," said Jerry. "And so, no doubt, it will be tobacco; but I must work, and if there's no work for me in our shop, then I'll have to find it outside our shop."

"Why not?"

"Shall us tell Johnny to-day and get his opinion?"

"I'll see what sort of frame he's in," replied Jane. "He's been dark lately, because he knows Dinah Waycott ain't going back on her word. It makes me dance with rage sometimes to think that John can want her still."

"Love's like that, I dare say," guessed Jerry. "It'll sink to pretty well anything."

"Well, I hate to see it—a fine man like my brother. He comes and goes, and they've made it up. If I was a man, and a woman jilted me, I

know when I'd make it up. I'd hate her to my dying day, and through eternity too."

"You oughtn't to say things like that, Jane."

"It ain't over yet," she continued. "I shouldn't wonder much if there was an upstore before long. Dinah can't keep secrets, and she's shameless. There's another in her eye as I have told you—talk of the devil!"

They were abreast of Falcon Farm, and a man descended from it by a path to the main road as Jane spoke. Maynard was on his way to Buckland. He met them and gave them 'good day' pleasantly enough. Jerry responded and praised the weather, but his sweetheart did not speak.

"Your brother be coming up to tea at the farm," said Lawrence.

"I know that," was all Jane answered, and he went his way without more words.

"There!" she exclaimed, when he was out of earshot.

"Surely you've got no quarrel with that chap? My father says he's a lot cleverer than you might think."

"I dare say he is a lot cleverer than some people," answered Jane; "but he ain't a lot cleverer than me. He's a tricky beast, that's what he is."

Jerry was much astonished.

"I never! You're the first person as I've heard tell against him. What have he done to you? If you have got any fair thing against the man, I'll damn soon be upsides with him."

"I'll tell you this," she replied. "I believe Dinah's hanging on at home and letting father have his way, not because she cares two straws

for father really. But she's on that man's track, and she's too big a fool to hide it from me. And him that would look at her, after what she done to Johnny, must be a beast."

Jerry scratched his head and stared at her.

"I'm sure I trust you're wrong, Jenny."

"Can't you see that, if they be after each other on the quiet, it must have been Maynard that kindiddled Dinah away from John in the first place?"

"For God's sake don't say such things," begged Jerry. "Don't you rush in like that, or you'll very likely wish you hadn't."

She considered this.

"All the same, I've had it on the tip of my tongue to whisper this to John."

"Don't, then—for the Lord's love, don't," implored Withycombe. "It would be playing with fire. If she's given over John once for all, then let him think no more about the woman. It ain't your business; and for that matter, it might be the best thing to happen for somebody to get hold of Dinah, and marry her, and take her far ways off."

"I'll thank you to look at it different, Jerry," said Jane sharply. "If I hate a man, for very good reasons, then you ought to do the same. I can see into things a lot deeper than what you can, as you've always granted, and I can see into Maynard. He's the silent, shifty sort, deep as a well—and I won't have you sticking up for him against me, so now then."

Jerry whistled.

"I've nothing for or against him," he answered slowly. "I scarcely know the man, but there's my father and others speak well of him; and I'm

always wishful to think well of everybody, unless there's a reason against."

"I'm the reason against, then," she declared, "and you've got to put me and my opinions first, I should hope."

They were silent for a time; then having reached Hazel Tor, Jerry helped his sweetheart to climb the great rocks. Soon they were perched high on the granite, and Jane opened a white and blue parasol, while he stretched his limbs at her feet and smoked his pipe. His ideas on the tobacco shop won Jane's smiles presently, and at heart Jerry regretted the moment when his future brother-in-law ascended through the pine-trees from the river and joined them.

The fret and sting of his hopeless quest had marked John Bamsey, and now he was come to the knowledge that no hope remained. Until now he had defied reason and lived on shadows spun of desire. He had sunk beneath his old pride and returned to Dinah's hand. He had not grovelled; but he assumed an attitude, after the passing of the first storm, that astonished his family. And Dinah it astonished also, filling her with fresh pain. Dominated by his own passion, he had endured the wonder in his mother's eyes, the doubt in Jane's. Dinah could not be explicit to him, since he had been careful not to give her any opportunity for the present. But, under his humility, he had bullied her. The very humility was a sort of bullying, and she felt first distracted and then indignant that he should persist.

Mrs. Bamsey knew that Dinah was not going to marry John, and in her heart she was thankful for it; while Jane had never shared her brother's hope that Dinah would return to him. She hated

Dinah, and while hot with sympathy for her brother, rejoiced that, sooner or later, her father's foster-daughter must disappear and never be linked to a Bamsey.

Johnny's present attitude, however, she did not know; and it was left for this hour amid the tree-girt rocks of Hazel Tor to teach her. She longed to learn what he would say if any other man were hinted of in connection with Dinah. She much wanted Johnny to share her opinion of Dinah, and now, ripened for mischief by the recent sight of Maynard, she prepared to sound Johnny. They spoke first of their own secret, and informed John, after exacting from him promises of silence.

He was moody and his expression had changed. Care had come into his face and its confidence had abated. To his few intimate friends he had already spoken unwisely and salved the wounds of pride by assuring them that the rupture was not permanent. He had even hinted that he was responsible for it—to give the woman he designed to wed a lesson. He had affected confidence in the future; and now knew that, when the truth came in sight, certain people would laugh behind his back. Upon such a temper it was easy to see how any mention of another man in connection with Dinah must fall.

John considered their dreams of a shop without much sympathy and doubted their wisdom.

"You're a woodman and only a woodman—bred to it," he declared. "What the mischief should you make messing about among shops and houses in a town? You know you'd hate it, just so much as I should myself, and you know well he would, if he don't, Jane."

"You don't think father will change about the five hundred pound?" asked Jane. "'Twas fear of that kept us quiet."

"No; he won't change. I was to have had the same."

"And so you will have," she said.

"You'll get one as feels for you, same as Jane feels for me, presently," ventured Jerry.

"And Dinah Waycott will get hell," added Jane; "and I dare say it may happen to her afore so mighty long, for that matter."

Jerry shrank, for Jane's brother fastened on this.

"What d'you mean?" he asked, and she was glad he did.

"Nothing, Johnny; only I've got eyes. I ban't one to think evil; but I can't help being pretty quick where you are concerned."

"What then, Jane?"

"We met Lawrence Maynard walking down the road a bit ago."

"And if you did?"

She dared greatly.

"I suppose you haven't ever heard his name along with hers?"

"'Hers'? D'you mean Dinah's? No, by God—nor any other man's! If I did—— What are you saying, Jane?"

To hear him swear made Jerry wonder, for John had never sworn in the past. The woodman, regarding him very anxiously, now perceived how his face and the tone of his voice had altered.

"She went for a long walk with him a few weeks back," said Jane. "She made no secret about it. He took her to see a stone out Hey Tor way."

"Did he? And why didn't you tell me?"

"I was going to; but I waited to see if there was more to tell. There is no more than that—not yet."

Johnny fell silent. His mind moved quickly. Love had already begun to suffer a change, half chemical, half psychological, that would presently poison it. Such passion as he had endured for Dinah would not fade and suffer extinction in Johnny's order of mind. He came to the ordeal untried and untested. He stared at Jane and Jerry unseeing, and they marked the blood leap up into his face and his eyes grow bright. This idea was new to him. What Jane said acted perilously, for it excused to himself his gathering temper under defeat and justified his wrath in his own sight.

"Be careful," he said. "D'you know all it means, Jane?"

"For God's sake, unsay it, Jenny," urged her sweetheart. "You can't know—nobody can know."

"If any other man thinks he'll have that woman——"

John said no more; but his own thoughts surged up and seemed to be bursting his head. A mountain of wrongs was toppling down upon him. He forgot his companions; then became suddenly conscious of their eyes staring into his. He looked at them as though they had been strangers, started up, went down the rocks at a pace to threaten his neck and then was gone through the trees, plunging straight ahead like a frightened animal.

Jerry Withycombe declared great alarm; Jane only felt the deepest interest.

"Now you've done it," said the man.

"So much the better," she answered. "I always meant to."

Meantime Maynard, musing on Jane Bamsey's curt attitude, had reached Buckland to spend an hour or two by invitation with Enoch Withycombe.

"Time drags for you sometimes, I expect," said Lawrence.

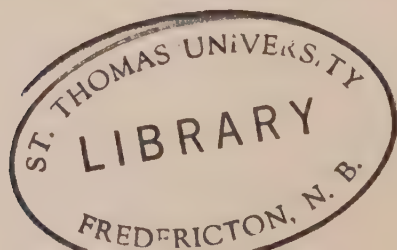
"No, I wouldn't say time drags," declared the sick man. "Time don't run more than sixty minutes to the hour with me, though I can't say it runs less, like it does for the hale and hearty people. Give me a new book and life don't drag. And there's always memory. I still have the power to go over my great runs with hounds. You'd think they'd get muddled up; but they do not."

"That's wonderful," said Lawrence.

"Yes, I can shut my eyes and get in a comfortable position and bring it all afore me and feel my horse pulling and my feet in the stirrups. And once or twice of late I've dreamed dreams; and that's even better, because for the moment you're in the saddle again—living—living!"

"They're terrible queer things—dreams," declared the younger.

"But there's things said about dreams that ban't true, Lawrence. I read somewhere that you never see the faces of the dead in dreams. That's false. You do see 'em. I saw my brother none so long ago—not as he was when he died, but as a little boy. And dreams be very reasonable in their unreason, you must know, for I was a little boy too. I saw his young face and flaxen hair, and heard him laugh, and we was busy as



bees climbing up a fir-tree to a squirrel's dray in a wood."

"Don't you get no sad dreams?" asked Lawrence.

"They come too. They leave you a bit down-daunted, I grant. And yours? You dream be-like? About anything interesting in particular on your mind, or just life in general?"

"Just life as it comes along, I reckon."

Enoch regarded him.

"You be looking ahead, as you've the right to do. You don't want to work for another all your life, do you?"

"I never look much ahead. Sometimes the past blocks the future, and a man's often less ambitious at thirty than he was ten years before. I don't particular want a home of my own. A home means a lot of things I've got no use for."

"Pretty much what some of the maidens think," said Enoch with craft. "For them a home means a man; and for us it means a woman, because we can't very well establish anything to be called home without one. Orphan Dinah wants badly to be off, so Ben Bamsey, her foster-father, tells me. And yet he's in a quandary; because he feels that if a happy home were in sight for her, he'd far sooner she waited for it."

"A very reasonable thought."

They fenced a little, but Lawrence was guarded, and committed himself to no opinion of Dinah until Enoch tried a direct question.

"What do you think of Orphan Dinah as a woman?" he asked.

"I like her," answered the other frankly. "Since you ask, there's no harm in saying I think she's a very fine character. She haven't shone much

of late, but she's made it clear to me and to you, I hope, that she did right. She's built on a big pattern and she's had a lot to put up with, and she's been patient about it."

"A bit out of the common, you'd say?"

"I think she is."

"I may tell you, for your ear alone, Maynard, that she likes you."

Lawrence tightened his lips.

"No, no—don't you say that. She don't know me. I dare say, if she was to, she'd feel different."

"Dinah can't hide herself from her foster-father's eyes," explained Enoch. "She don't try to for that matter, and Ben sees that there's something about you that interests her; and you've told me there be something to her that interests you. And what follows? I'm only an old man speaking, and you mustn't take offence."

"There's no offence," answered Lawrence. "You'd not offend anybody. But I'd rather not have any speech about it, Mr. Withycombe."

Enoch had said all he desired to say and learned all he wanted to learn. He felt glad, therefore, when another visitor appeared. It was Arthur Chaffe in his Sunday black.

"If one's enough at a time, I'll be off," he said, "and fetch up again next Sunday."

But Enoch welcomed him.

"I'm in good fettle, Arthur, and be very willing to make hay while the sun shines."

Arthur, however, doubted.

"You'm looking so grim as a ghost, my old dear," he answered, and Withycombe laughed.

"You be a cheerful one for a death-bed, sure enough," he answered.

They chatted till Melinda returned and gave the three men tea.

The old hunter again spoke of Dinah and offered examples of her quality and difference from other young women. Mrs. Honeysett tended rather to disparage her of late, having been influenced thereto in certain quarters; but Arthur Chaffe supported Dinah, and Lawrence listened.

He presently, however, quoted.

"Long ago, before she had to break with Bamsey, I remember a word she said to me," he remarked. "It showed she was finding out that everybody couldn't be relied upon. She asked me if I was faithful. It seemed a curious question at the time."

"And you said you was, no doubt?" asked Melinda.

"We must all be faithful," declared Arthur Chaffe. "Where there's no faith, there's no progress."

"The world goes round on trust," admitted Mr. Withycombe, "and the more man can trust man, the easier we advance and the quicker. 'Faithful' be the word used between us in business and it wasn't the one we fixed upon for nothing. 'Yours faithfully' we say."

"Yes, oftener than we mean it, God forgive us," sighed Mr. Chaffe. "'Tis often only a word and too few respect it."

"We must be civil even to enemies," said the sick man.

"It's a bit mean to hide our feelings so much as we do," declared Melinda.

"Warner Bloom was a fine example," answered Mr. Chaffe. "Foes he had a plenty, as such a straight and pushing chap must; but he never

quarrelled with man or mouse. He never gave any living soul a straw to catch hold of. He got on with his relations even!"

"How?" asked Maynard.

"Never criticised 'em. Such was his amazing skill that he let them live their lives their own way, and treated 'em with just the same respect he showed to everybody else."

They enjoyed tea in a cheerful temper, then Arthur Chaffe prepared to depart, and Maynard left with him.

"I laugh, but with sorrow in my heart," said Arthur, "for that dear man be going down the hill terrible fast to the experienced eye. We shall miss him—there's a lot of Christian charity to him, and I only wish to God he'd got the true Light. It may come yet. It may flash in upon him at the last. Us must never forget that the prayer of a righteous man availeth much, Maynard."

"And the life of a righteous man availeth more, Mr. Chaffe," answered Lawrence.

"That we ain't told," replied the elder. "We can only leave the doubter to the mercy of his Maker; and there's many and many got to be left like that. Us say 'sure and certain hope' over a lot of mortal dust, where too well our intellects tell us the hope ban't so certain nor yet sure as us would like to feel."

He perked away on his long thin legs, like a friendly stork, and Maynard set his face upward for his home.

CHAPTER XVII

DINAH

THOUGH CIRCUMSTANCES had of late baffled Dinah Waycott and tended sometimes to beget a reserve and caution foreign to her, there was still no confusion in her mind when she communed with herself. Therefore, when she found that she stood face to face with a new thing, she pretended no doubt as to the name of it. Bewilderment and dismay she did feel that any such paramount event should have overtaken her at this stage in her life; for Dinah was not insensitive, though so plain-spoken, and now painfully she felt this was no time to have developed the burning preoccupation that already swept into nothingness every adventure and emotion of the past.

There had happened a precious wonder beyond all wonders, but Dinah felt angry with herself that, under present conditions, any loophole existed for such a selfish passion.

Silent, however, she could not be for long. There was one to whom she never feared to talk and from whom she had no secrets. To him, her foster-father, Dinah had taken every joy and sorrow, hope and fear since she could talk. Only once, and that in the matter of his own son, John,

had she hidden her heart from Ben Bamsey, yet found it possible to show it to another.

She remembered that now; and it was that same man who, from the first, had possessed a nameless quality to challenge and arrest Dinah. Gradually he had occupied a larger domain in her mind, until he overwhelmed it and her revelation was complete. Together they walked once more at her wish, after their first long tramp, while, agreeably to the invitation of Mr. Bamsey, Lawrence Maynard again visited Green Hayes upon a Sunday afternoon. Then, indeed, under the eyes of Jane and her mother, Dinah had hidden her heart very effectually, and even made occasion to leave the house and go elsewhere before Maynard's visit was ended; but she knew by signs in her body and soul that she was in love. The amazing novelty of her thoughts, the transfiguration they created in her outlook upon all things, the new colours they imparted to any vision of the future, convinced her that there could be no doubt. Against this reality, the past looked unreal; before this immensity, the past appeared dwarfed and futile. That cloudy thing, her whole previous existence, was now reduced to a mere huddled background—its only excuse the rainbow that had suddenly glowed out upon it.

She was ashamed that love could have happened to her at this moment and thrust so abruptly in upon her sad experience with Johnny. It seemed callous and ungenerous to allow such dreams into her heart while well she knew that his was heavy. But she would not blame herself, for her conscience was clear. Maynard had meant nothing to her when she gave up her first lover, and it was

no thought of him, or any man, that had determined her to do so.

Her love at least was pure as love well could be, for she did not know that he returned it; sometimes, at first, she almost hoped he would not. But that was only in the dim and glimmering dawn of it. So she nursed it secretly and waited and wondered, and, meantime, strove to find a way to leave Green Hayes. But still Ben opposed her suggestions, and then there came a time when, from the first immature fancy that to love him secretly, herself unloved, would be enough, Dinah woke into a passionate desire that he should love her back again. Now she was mature, accomplished, awake and alert, lightning quick to read his mood, the inflexion of every word he uttered when he was beside her, the faintest brightening of his eyes, his dress, his walk, the inspiration of each moment.

She could not help it. Often she returned dull and daunted, not with him but herself; and as she began to know, from no sign of his but by her own quickened sex endowment, that he cared for her, she grew faint and ashamed again. He had taught her a great deal. He seemed to be very wise and patient, but not particularly happy—rather unfinished even on some sides of his experience. There were many things he did not know, and he seemed not nearly as interested in life as she was, or as desirous to have it more abundantly. Johnny had evinced a much keener appetite for living and far greater future ambitions than Maynard. Lawrence was, in fact, as Mr. Bamsey had said, 'a twilight sort of man.' But it was a cool, clear, self-contained twilight that he moved in, and he appeared to see distinctly enough through it.

Dinah thought it was twilight of morning rather than night. She imagined him presently emerging into dawn, and dreamed of helping him to do so. Her native freedom of mind broke down all barriers to private thinking, and sometimes she longed for him; then she chastened herself and planned a future without him and found it not worth remaining alive for. She began to sleep ill, but hid the signs. She plotted to see Maynard and was skilful to conceal the fact that she did so. He always welcomed her, sometimes with a merry word, sometimes with a sad one. The milch cows grazed upon the Moor now, and once or twice, sighting them a mile off upon her way home, Dinah would creep near and wait for Lawrence and the sheep dog to round them up and turn them to the valley for milking. She would hide in a thicket, or behind a boulder, and when he came would get a few precious words.

She knew now that Maynard cared for her; but she discounted his every speech and granted herself the very minimum. She was fearful of hoping too much, yet could not, for love's sake, hope too little. She longed to set her mind at rest upon the vital question, and at last did so. Striving to chill and belittle his every word, she still could no longer doubt. He was often difficult to understand, yet some things she did now clearly comprehend. She had already seen a man in love, and though the love-making of Johnny differed very widely from that of Lawrence, though indeed Lawrence never had made a shadow of love to her, yet she knew at last, by mental and physical signs, that he did love her.

She hugged this to her heart and felt that nothing else mattered, or would ever matter. For

a time she even returned to her first dream and assured herself that love was enough. He might tell her some day; he might never tell her; but she knew it, and whether they came together, or lived their lives apart, the great fact would remain. Yet there was no food in any such conclusion, no life, no fertility, no peace.

She came to Ben Bamsey at this stage of her romance, for she hungered and thirsted to tell it; and to her it seemed that her foster-father ought to know. She came to him fresh from a meeting with Lawrence, for she had been, at Mr. Bamsey's wish, with a message to Falcon Farm, and she had met Maynard afterwards as she returned over the foothills of the Beacon.

The year was swinging round, and again the time had come for scything the fern, that it might ripen presently for the cattle byres.

He stopped a moment and shook hands with her.

"Just been up to see Soosie-Toosie," said Dinah. "Terrible sorry Mr. Palk's cut his hand so bad."

"Yes; it'll have to go in a sling for a bit. He thought it would mend and didn't take no great count of it, and now it's festered and will be a fortnight before it's all right."

"I wish I could help," she said. "If you was to do his work and Mr. Stockman would let me come and milk the cows for a week——"

"No, no—no need for any help. Tom can do a lot. It's only his left hand, and master's turning to. He says if he can't do the work of Tom's left hand, it's a shame to him."

"Did Mr. Palk get his rise he was after?"

"He did not, Dinah. But Mr. Stockman put

it in a very nice way. He's going to raise us both next year. And you? Nothing turned up?"

She shook her head.

"A funny thing among 'em all they can't find just the right work. I wish you was away from Green Hayes."

She had told him all about her difficulties and he appreciated them. He thought a great deal about Dinah now, but still more about himself. He had been considering her when she appeared; and for the moment he did not want to see her. His mind ebbed and flowed where Dinah was concerned, and he was stubborn with himself and would not admit anything. He persisted in this attitude, but now began to perceive it was impossible much longer to do so. If Dinah had read him, he also had read her, for she was not difficult to read and lacked some of the ordinary armour of a woman in love with a man. He knew time could not stand still for either of them, yet strove to suspend it. Sometimes he was gentle and sometimes he was abrupt and ungenial when they met. To-day he dismissed her.

"Don't you bide here now," he said. "I'm busy, Dinah, and I've got a good bit on my mind too."

"I'm sorry, then. You ask Soosie if I shall come and milk. That would give you more time. Good morning, Lawrence."

He had seen how her face fell.

"I wish I could think of a way out for you. Perhaps I shall. I do have it on my mind," he said. "But there's difficulties in a small place like this. Pity you ain't farther off, where you could breathe easier."

For some reason this remark cheered her. She

left him without speaking again and considered his saying all the way home. The interpretation she put upon it was not wholly mistaken, yet it might have surprised the man, for we often utter a thought impelled thereto by subconscious motives we hardly feel ourselves. He might have asked himself whether he wished her out of her present difficult environment in order that his own approach to her should become easier and freer of doubtful interpretation in the mouths of other people; or he might have considered whether, for his own peace, he wished to see Dinah so far away that reasonable excuses should exist for dropping her acquaintance. He lagged behind her, for love seldom wakens simultaneously, or moves with equal pace on both sides. He might continue to lag and fall farther behind, or he might catch her and pass her.

She went home now, and after dinner on that day found opportunity to speak with her foster-father. They were cutting oats, and she descended to the valley field beside Ben and made a clean breast of her secrets, only to find they were not hidden from him. He treated her as one much younger than she really was, and this process always satisfied Dinah and made her feel happier with Ben Bamsey than his family, who made no such concession, but, on the contrary, attributed qualities to Dinah she lacked.

"Foster-father," she said, "I'm wishful to have a tell and here's a good chance. I be getting in a proper mizmaze I do assure 'e."

"You must be patient, my little dear," he answered.

"I've been patient for six months, though it's more like six years since I changed about poor

Johnny. And other people, so well as I, do feel I'd be better away."

"Have I ever said you wouldn't be better away, Dinah? I know only too well how it is. But a father can look deeper into life than his child. I'm wide awake—watching."

"If you wasn't here, I'd have runned away long ago. For a little bit, after that cruel come-along-of-it, I wouldn't have minded to die. Now that's passed; but you can't tell what it is to know that you're fretting and galling two other women. And Mrs. Bamsey and Jane have a right to be fretted and galled by me."

He had not guessed she much felt this side of the position.

"You'm growing up, I see, like everybody else," he said. "I forget that I can't have it both ways, and can't have you a loving, watchful daughter and a child too. And if you can think for me, as you do so wonderful, then you'm old enough to feel for yourself, of course. I suppose you must go and I mustn't find nothing against no more. And yet——"

He broke off, his mind upon Maynard.

While he was hesitating and wondering whether he should name the man, Dinah saved him the trouble.

"Only this morning coming home from Falcon Farm I met Lawrence—Lawrence Maynard, and he—even he, an outsider so to say—said he thought I'd be better far ways off. And I well know it. I didn't ought to be breathing the same air as Johnny."

He, however, was more concerned for the moment with the other man than his own son.

"When you say 'Lawrence Maynard,' Dinah—

what do you say? Why for has he troubled his head about your affairs?"

"You like him?" she answered.

"And so do you, seemingly. And how much do you like him? Do you like him as much as I think you do, Dinah?"

She was astonished but pleased.

"I'm glad you ask me that; but I hope Mrs. Bamsey and Jane——?"

"So do I. No, they haven't marked nothing; or if they have, they've hid it from me. Tell me."

"I love him, then."

"Ah!"

"It sounds a fearful thing spoke out naked. But truth's truth, and I'm thankful to tell you. Don't you call it wicked nor nothing like that. It only happened a little ago—not till long, long after I dropped Johnny. But it has happened; and now I know I never loved dear Johnny a morsel."

He reflected.

"What about his side?"

"I don't know—yet I do. There's some things you feel. I don't think I could have loved him if I hadn't known he loved me. Could I?"

"He's never said it, however?"

"A man's eyes and ways say things."

"Don't you talk like this to anybody but me, Dinah," urged Mr. Bamsey.

"Not likely. Is it wrong?"

"I'm moving in the matter; I'm moving," he answered. "You can't hide much from me, and already I've had Maynard in my thoughts."

"You haven't?"

"Yes. I've seen a very good, common friend.

And I'll tell you this. I sounded Mr. Withycombe—the bed-lier. The young man often goes of a Sunday to see him, and Enoch thinks well of him. But more than that. He's spoke cautious with Maynard, and Maynard likes you. He granted you was a remarkable pattern of woman."

She had his arm, and her own tightened upon it.

"Foster-father!"

"And now you'll understand why I'm marking time. The rest be in the hands of God. You keep out of his way for a bit—Maynard, I mean; and we'll watch how it goes."

"Nothing else matters now," she said.

"A lot matters now; but what matters be up to him."

"I didn't think it was possible to be so happy as I be this minute, foster-father."

"Put it out of your mind, however, so far as nature will let you. We be groping in the dark."

"No, no—it's all light—all light now."

"So far as he's concerned, we be in the dark," he repeated. "No doubt the time's near when he'll offer for you, Dinah. And then he's got to come to me. I remember the first evening he was to Green Hayes, and seemed a thought under the weather, and I said he'd got a grievance against life; and I must hear all about that grievance, if such there is."

"You'll never hear anything but the truth from him. He wouldn't do anything that you wouldn't like. I'm feared of him in a way. He's very strict and very stern sometimes. He's better'n me."

"That no man ever was, or will be," said Ben.

"I'm glad you came to me with this; for if you'd hung off much longer, I'd have had to see the

man. Now I shan't. We know where we stand, because you'm so open-minded, thank God, along with me. But we don't know—at least we can't be sure we know—where he stands. It's up to Mr. Maynard to unfold his feelings."

"And why should you reckon he advised me to be off from here so soon as I could?" asked Dinah again. "Queerly enough, I liked him for saying it, and yet—yet you might think there might be a frosty reason."

"There might be. Time will show. You can't be off till we've found the proper place for you to be off to. Now you run home about your chores. Mother wants you in the garden. There's the last lot of rasps to be picked."

She ran up the hill and he descended to a field of oats. The weather after a spell of sunny days began to break up and Mr. Bamsey hoped to get his crop off the ground before it did so. But his mind was not on his oats. He believed that Dinah must indeed leave him now, and guessed that Maynard would think it wise to abandon his present work and take her far away. Mr. Bamsey knew what this must mean for him. He did not disguise from himself that he loved Dinah better than anything on earth.

CHAPTER XVIII

MAYNARD

MR. STOCKMAN, having decided that sea air and rest were desirable to fortify him against another winter, had been absent from his home and was only recently returned. He had visited a friend, who farmed land in the neighbourhood of Berry Head, above Brixham, and he declared himself very much better for the change of scene and companionship. He related his adventures, and also expatiated in Soosie-Toosie's ear upon a woman whom he had met—the daughter of his friend.

"Mr. King has but one stay-at-home child, like me," he said, "and I could wish you were able to see the way Ann King runs her father's house. Not a breath against you, Susan—I thank my God every night on my knees for such a daughter; but there's a far-sightedness about Ann as I don't remember to have marked in any other female."

"How old might she be?" asked Susan.

"Older than you by ten years I dare say; but it's not so much that as her way of dealing with life. The Elms Farm is bigger than ours and mostly corn. They grow amazing fine wheat, to the very edge of the cliffs; and Ann King reigns

over the place and the people in such a way that all goes on oiled wheels. She's always ahead of time, that woman—bends time to her purpose and never flustered. A great lesson."

Mr. Palk heard these things. There was growing between him and Joe a shadow of antagonism. So faintly did this contest of wills begin that neither appreciated it yet.

"And how many females do Miss King have at her word of command, master?" asked Thomas, his subconscious self up in arms as usual when Susan was even indirectly assailed.

Joe stared blandly at him.

"Hullo! I didn't know you was there, Thomas. I was talking to my daughter, Thomas, not you, if you'll excuse me; and if you've got nothing on your hands for the moment, perhaps you won't mind having a look over the harness. I was put about when I came home to see a bit of rope where there did ought to be leather, Thomas."

"I was going to name it," answered Mr. Palk.

"Good; I'm sure you was. I admire you a lot for making shift and saving my pocket. But we must keep our heads up, even under the present price of harness, if we can."

Joe returned from his holiday full of energy. He had to-day been at a sale of sheep at Hey Tor village and was tramping with Maynard by road behind thirty fine ewes from a famous breeder. He discoursed of sheep and his man listened without much concentration.

They trudged together behind the raddled flock with a sheep-dog attending them.

"The rare virtue of our Dartmoors is not enough

known," declared Mr. Stockman. "In my opinion, both for flesh and coat, there's no long-wool sheep in the world to beat 'em. Yet you'll find, even to this day, that our Devon long-wools be hardly known outside the South Hams and Cornwall."

"That class ought to be included in all important shows certainly," admitted Lawrence.

"And they ought to be shown in their wool," added Mr. Stockman.

They debated this question till the younger man wearied of it and was glad when a farmer on horseback overtook them. He had been a seller, and he approved of Joe's opinions, now repeated for his benefit. Maynard walked a little apart and found leisure to think his own thoughts. They revolved about one subject only, and reverted to it with painful persistence.

He was in love with Dinah Waycott and knew that she was in love with him. The something that was left out of her made this all the more clear, for she relied on no shield of conventions; she had a way to slip a subject of the clothes it generally wore in shape of speech.

She had exerted no wiles, but she could not be illusive, and the obvious qualities of Dinah which had appealed to Johnny's first love had also, for different reasons, overwhelmed Maynard. Experienced men might have missed those elements in Dinah that, for them, make a woman most provocative and desirable; but in the case of this man his own taste of existence and his personal adventure combined to intensify the charm that her peculiar nature possessed. He had known nothing like her; she contrasted at almost every possible point with what he had known; she shone

for him as an exemplar of all that was most desirable in feminine character. He had tried to adopt a fatherly attitude to Dinah and, for a considerable time, succeeded. The view he took of her at their first acquaintance, when she was betrothed to John Bamsey, persisted after the breaking of the engagement; but the very breaking of the engagement enlarged this view, and the freedom, that could no longer be denied to her after that event, had improved their knowledge of each other until both learned the same fact. Then Maynard could pretend fatherly friendship no more, nor did the figment of an elder brother serve. He loved her and she loved him. A thing he had never considered as possible now complicated a life that for seven years he had striven with all his might to simplify; and the new situation extended far beyond Dinah, for it was calculated to alter his own agreement and undertaking with himself. These covenants had been entered into with himself alone. Circumstances had long ago combined, at a certain period of his early adult life, to change the entire texture of existence, deflect its proposed purpose and throw down the goal he set out to attain. And with the changes wrought in temporal ambitions had come others. Life thus dammed ceased to flow. His future collapsed and in its place appeared a new purpose, if negation could be called a purpose. Now it seemed that a closed book was thrown open again and he stood once more facing outlets to life that even implied happiness. His existence for seven years, it appeared, had not been a progression, but a hiatus. Yet he knew, even while he told himself this, that no man can for seven years stand still.

There was need for a jolt forward now, and the problem appeared simple enough as to the thing he must do, but shattering when he saw it done. He was deeply agitated, yet through the inexorable shot a thread of unexpected hope and beauty. To cut this thread, which had crept so magically into the grey fabric of existence and touched the days of his crepuscular life with the glimmering of an unguessed sunrise, promised to be a task so tremendous that it was not strange he hesitated.

He had reached an attitude of mind, and that long before he met Dinah Waycott, which now suffered no shock from the personal problem. He had dealt in generalities and meditated on human conduct in many aspects. The actual, present position, too, he had debated, and even asked himself how he might expect to act under certain circumstances. But the possibility of those circumstances ever arising had not occurred to him, and now that they had done so, he saw that his view and his judgment were only one side of the question in any case. The visionary figure of a woman had turned into a real one, and as such, her welfare and her future, not his own, instantly became the paramount thing. The temptation now lay in this. He knew Dinah so well that he believed, from her standpoint, she might look at his supreme problem as he did; and for this very reason he delayed. Reason argued that, did Dinah see eye to eye with him, no further difficulty could exist, while if she did not, there was an end of it; but some radical impulse of heredity, or that personal factor of character, which was the man himself, fought with reason at the very heart of his being and made the issue a far deeper matter for Maynard now.

The horseman left Mr. Stockman and galloped forward, while Joe regarded his retreating figure with mild amusement and turned to Lawrence.

"Did you hear that?" he asked, and the other replied that he had not.

"I've vexed him—just the last thing ever I meant. It's a funny world. If you mind your own business and stick to it, the people say you're a selfish, hard-hearted creature, with no proper feeling to humans at large. And if you seek to mind other people's business, and help the folk along, then they call you a meddling Paul Pry and a busybody, and so on. That man's just told me to look after my own affairs, because I went out of my way to give him a valuable tip about his!"

"More fool him," said Maynard. "The fools are the hardest to help."

"Nothing but the people themselves keep me from doing a great deal more good in the world than I might," declared Joe.

"They're jealous of your sense, I reckon."

"Not a mistake of the wise, however. For my part I've lived long enough to see that jealousy, look at it all round, is the silliest vice we humans suffer from. Jealous I never could be of any living creature."

But though Joe despised jealousy, such was his humour that within an hour, for the sake of personal amusement, he sought to awake the futile flame in another breast.

Melinda Honeysett was waiting at Falcon Farm when the men returned, but she had come to see Lawrence Maynard, not Mr. Stockman. He, however, entertained her while his man was looking after the sheep. Indeed, he insisted on Melinda joining him in a cup of tea. He had

not seen her since his return from Brixham, and now the rogue in Joe twinkled to the top and he began to enumerate the rare qualities of Miss King. He knew that Melinda regarded herself as holding a sort of proprietary right over him, and he much enjoyed this shadowy bondage and often pretended to groan under it. But now he launched on the task of making Melinda jealous for his private entertainment. With Soosie-Toosie the enterprise had failed. She humbly accepted the accomplishments of Ann King and praised her genius so heartily that Joe soon dropped the subject; but for Melinda it came as a new idea, and this enthusiasm on Mr. Stockman's part for a paragon at once unknown and eligible caused Mrs. Honeysett just that measure of exasperation her first male friend desired to awaken.

"My!" said Melinda, after listening to the glowing story of the farmer's daughter, her virtues, her resource, and her financial ability; "I didn't know there were any angels to Brixham. Do she fly about, or only walk, like us common women?"

"No, she walks," said Joe, delighted at his instant success; "but even in walking she never wastes a footstep, like most of us. Never wastes anything, and yet not close. And as to being an angel, Melinda, you may say she is that—just in the same sense that you and Soosie-Toosie and all nice women are angels."

Mrs. Honeysett laughed somewhat harshly.

"Don't you drag me and Susan in. Such poor creatures as us—not worthy to hold a candle to this here Jane King."

"Ann King," corrected Joe.

"You and me will go and take lessons, and ax

her to teach us how to look after our poor fathers," said Melinda to Miss Stockman. "And, by the same token, I must get back to mine. I only came to see Maynard, because father wants to have a tell with him—to-night if possible. Poor father's going down hill fast now—all, no doubt, because I've not understood how to nurse him and tend him and live my life for him alone."

Joe pushed the joke a little deeper.

"You mustn't say that. There's nobody like you to look after a sick man, Melinda, and I'm sure Miss King couldn't have done it better and steadier than you have. But perhaps it might be a clever thought to invite her up-along. I dare say she'd make time to pay us a visit, if I told her as you and Soosie-Toosie were very wishful to make her acquaintance and gather in a bit of her far-reaching sense."

"Ax her to come, then," said Mrs. Honeysett. "'Twill be something to see a really wise creature in Buckland, because we'm such a lot of God-forsaken zanies here—men and women alike."

She rose breathing rather deeply.

"No tea, thank you," she said. "I've changed my mind. I'll go home and pray for the light of Ann King to fall on my dark road. And when she comes along, you ask her if she'll give a poor, weak-minded widow a little of her sense. Tell her I'm one of they women that thinks the moon be made of green cheese, will 'e? Tell her that; and say as I'm going to give certain parties a rest in future, because, though a poor worm not worthy to be seen alongside her, yet I've got my pride, like the cleverest of us. And give Lawrence Maynard father's message, Soosie, if you please."

"Come back, you silly gosling!" shouted Joe;

but Melinda did not come back. He laughed very heartily, yet not loud enough for the departing woman to hear him.

"Lord! To think now!" he said. "I've took a proper rise out of her, eh?"

"You have," admitted Susan. "And if you done it on purpose, it weren't a very clever thing to do. Melinda's fiery, but a good friend and a great admirer of yours, father."

"You never larn all there is to know about a female," he said. "I meant to get her wool off—just for a bit of honest fun; but I can't say as I ever understood she felt so deep how clever she was. She's a vain, dear creature."

"It weren't that," explained Susan. "She ain't vain, though she knows her worth, and so do everybody else know it. And her father be going to die presently and—and God knows what's in her thoughts, of course. And then to hear that Miss King be the top flower of the bunch, and such a wonder as was never seen by mortal man—why, of course, Melinda took it to heart a bit. Who wouldn't?"

"You didn't," said Joe.

"No, I didn't, because I know my place, father. But Melinda's a fine thing and you know in your heart that a virgin woman, like Miss King, however clever she be, couldn't teach Melinda nothing about how to look after a man."

"Fun be thrown away on you creatures," said Joe. "You're terrible thick-headed where a joke's the matter, Soosie; but I did think as Melinda was brighter."

He turned to Palk, who had just entered for his tea. Thomas had heard the word thick-headed applied to Susan.

“Did you ever know a woman as could see a bit of fun, Tom?”

The horseman reflected.

“Women’s fun ban’t the same as ours,” he answered. “No doubt they’ve got their own pattern of fun. But there ain’t much time for Miss Stockman to practise laughing in this house.”

“Ah! You can be so comical as any of us when you’m in a mind for it, Thomas,” said his master.

CHAPTER XIX

LIGHT OF AUTUMN

SENT TO FIND GRANITE and bidden to choose a boulder that would split out, so that needful stone posts might be fashioned from it, Lawrence Maynard climbed the Beacon and loitered here and there, examining the great stones that heaved their backs or sides from the earth. For the master of Falcon Farm was a Venville man and claimed Moor rights extending over stone and turbary.

Lawrence marked certain masses and thrust in sticks beside them, that presently Joe Stockman might himself ascend and determine, from his better knowledge, which blocks would yield the needful pillars. For the farmer was skilled in granite and declared it to be a good-natured stone in understanding hands.

Lawrence was mastered by his own thoughts presently, and with the pageant of late autumn flung under his eyes, he sat down where a boulder protected him from the fierce wind and brooded. From time to time the vision of things seen broke in.

Upon this canvas, so hugely spread, Nature painted her pictures in punctual procession, and in some measure Maynard valued them. Indeed,

under the present stress and storm that unsettled the weather of his mind, he found himself more pervious than of old to the natural impressions of the Vale.

To-day a north wind shouted overhead, drove the scattered clouds before it and hummed in organ notes upon the great mass of granite that capped the Beacon. Copper red ribbons of beech fell broadly into the depths below—and, against their fire, the plantations of the pine wove darker patterns, where they descended over the shoulders of the hills, until the air and space wrought magic upon their distances and swept them together in one glowing integument for the low lands. There it was as though a mighty tiger skin had been flung down upon the undulating earth, so rich in orange-tawny and russet were the forest reaches, so black the slant shadows thrown by the low sun at spinney edge, along the boundary of hanging woods, or where open fields broke horizontally into the kingdom of the trees. There shone green meadows against the flame of the fall around them; and the ploughed fallows heightened colour by their contrast. They intruded their tessellate designs, wrought out in a network of squares and triangles; they climbed the hills, penetrated the valley depths and ceased only where the upland ramparts barred their progress with heath and stone. Shadows flew to dim the splendour and then again reveal it; nor was the clarity of the air purchased without cost, for unseen moisture drenched it and sometimes took shape of separate storms, sweeping in a low, grey huddle over the earth they hid. They drew their veils over half a league of the land at a time, then dislimned and vanished again. And far

away, beyond the last peaks and saliencies southward, stretched a horizon of dazzling and colourless light, where sea girdled earth and Devon rolled dark against the liquid brilliance of the Channel lifted beyond it.

The Vale, with its river winding through the midst, was a frame for these far-away passages of light and darkness—a setting and boundary, rich but restrained; for under the sleight of distance, the glories of the colour, each touch a tiny leaf of gold or crimson, were cooled and kneaded with shadow and tempered by the blue November air.

To appreciate the detail of the spectacle, the throb and palpitation of so much fire, it had been necessary to descend among the forest glades, where were revealed the actual pigments of all this splendour and the manner of Nature's painting. Thence the scene, whose harmonies rang so subdued from the height of the Beacon above, resolved itself into a riot of colour. Larch and ash were already grey, and the lemon of the birch, the gold of the elm flashed out against the heavier bronzes and coppers of oak and beech. The wood smoke that rose so thinly seen from aloft, here ascended from a fire in a column of gentian blue under the sunshine, purple against shadow. Carpets of colour extended where the trees broke—textures of scarlet whortle and crimson blackberry, ivy, moss and glittering dead grass. The spindle flashed its fruits, and aglets and haws sparkled on briar and bough. There, too, the sheltered fern had not been beaten flat as on the open heaths above. It rose shoulder high, delicate in dead but unbroken filigrees, with many a spider's iridescent web twinkling rainbows upon its amber frondage. The dusky regiments of the

conifers intensified the blaze, and, against them, stems of maiden birches leapt upward to the last of their foliage, like woodland candlesticks of silver supporting the altar-flame within these sanctuaries.

Intermittently Maynard allowed his thoughts to dwell upon these things spread under his eyes; and he even dipped sometimes into the communion of the trees and could spare a moment to reflect upon the ceaseless battle under the splendour, and how every tree of these countless thousands had fought through half a century for its place in the sun. But for the most part his reflections turned upon himself.

He had taken life in an uncompromising spirit of old; he had displayed a strength of purpose and a grip of his own values in some measure remarkable for a man, at that time barely beyond his majority. And now, into a life that he had deemed cut away once and for all from all further human complexities, was come this unexpected and supreme problem. Must such rifts and gleams as had of late been thrust through his grey existence be shut out? For a time he considered with himself whether this should be so; but he weighed Dinah's fate more tenderly in the balance than his own. For him, indeed, the facts did not preclude temptation; but he had yet to learn how they would affect her.

He was come, however, to the inevitable place of open dealing: he must tell her all that still remained hidden from her. With a sense of relief he felt that more could not be done until that position had been reached; and for the present he put away from himself any thought of what would follow his revelation in her mind, or the

great final decision that must be called for from his own.

Then he dropped his affairs for a little while and let the sense of the immense and outspread earth drift into his thoughts. It heartened him and inspired him to a dim resolution that a man might glean something from the purposes of a world so spacious and splendid, until that he, too, should rise worthy of his place in it, and largely order his own part amid the great scheme of things. But he guessed all the time that such poetry only played over the surface of forthcoming events. It had less power of reality than the bubbles on a wave to influence its way. The final pattern of things lay deep within himself. No man or woman could ever alter the terms of his own destiny, or change the principles under which he willed to live. So he imagined.

CHAPTER XX

THE HUNTER'S HORN

THE DAYS BEGAN to close in and winter was at the door again before Maynard spoke. Then chance precipitated the event, when, to the unhidden joy of both, they met in the street at Ashburton, on a Saturday afternoon of late November.

"Are you free?" he asked.

"Yes. I've come in to do some chores for Mrs. Bamsey."

"And I'm running errands for Falcon Farm. Neddy Tutt's milking this evening. How would it be if we were to have a cup of tea together?"

"I'd love it. I am thankful to see you, Lawrence! Sometimes I began to think I never was going to no more."

"You had to see me once more, anyway. Where shall we go out of the way, so as I can talk?"

"Anywhere you please."

He considered.

"There's a little tea-shop in Church Street with a back parlour. We'd have the room to ourselves, I reckon. I must go to gunsmith for the governor and get a hundred cartridges. Then I'm free."

"I never thought I was in for such a treat when I woke up this morning," said Dinah.

"I wish to God it was a treat. I've got a lot on my mind when I look at you."

"A shared trouble soon grows light," she said; yet his heavy voice chilled her. They walked side by side, and to walk by him cheered Dinah again. The cartridges awaited Lawrence, and in twenty minutes they were at the little eating-shop in Church Street. A woman behind the counter smiled at Maynard and recognised him.

"A pot of tea and some bread and butter and cake, missis," he said; then he entered a small parlour behind the shop. The woman lighted a gas jet over their heads, in the corner that Lawrence chose farthest from the door. Presently she brought a tray with their tea upon it, and then she left them.

"Will you pour the tea, Dinah?"

"Yes, I will, then," she said. "Be you happy to see me, Lawrence?"

"You know it. I'd sooner see you than anything in the world. Shall I tell her to light a blink of fire?"

"No, no; I'm not cold. Talk—talk to me. Let me hear you talk."

He leant across and took her hand.

"Let me hold it a minute. I like to feel it. You know a bit of what I'm going to tell you; but only a terrible little bit."

She held his hand tightly.

"I love you. I've known it a long time, Dinah. That's the little bit I think you know. If that was all——"

"It is all—all on earth that matters to me," she said quietly. "Yes, I did know. If it

happens to you, you must know. I wouldn't have doubted, perhaps, if I hadn't loved you back so fierce. That made me doubt, because it seemed too good to be true. Now the rest don't signify. Nothing's so big as knowing you love me, Lawrence."

"The bigger thing is that it can't be."

She shrank and he felt her hand grow limp. He took his from it and considered how to begin speaking. Meantime she spoke.

"That's a hard thing—not a bigger thing," she said quietly; "it can't alter what is."

"You must hear from the beginning. If I'd ever thought this would happen, I'd have gone long ago. But it came like a thief, Dinah."

"Go on—tell why not—quick."

"I'm married," he said.

She bent her head and leant back and shut her eyes.

"That's the only thing that could come between you and me. I'm married. It's a mad tale, and I was the madman, so most people said. Maybe you will, too; maybe you won't. Yet, if I thought what I was going to say would make you hate me, I wouldn't say it."

She was looking at him with wet eyes.

"How could I hate you? Love's love."

"When I went into the world after father died, I was took by a relation of my mother's at Barnstaple, you must know; and there was that in me that made for getting on. I did well, and when my mother's sister, who had a little dairy, found the sort I was, she reckoned to do me a turn and suit herself also. By twenty years old I knew the business inside out; and when I was twenty-one, my aunt, who was a widow, bargained with me

to let her go out and drop the shop and be paid a regular income for her lifetime. When she died I was to have all. It worked well for a year and a half, and I found I'd got a turn for the business, and opened out a bit, and bought a few cows and even had thoughts of going higher up into the middle of the town and starting a bigger place.

"But that wanted a woman, and then a woman came along—the very woman on all the earth for the business."

"You loved her?"

"Yes, I loved her, Dinah. I wouldn't have thought twice about marrying any woman I didn't love."

"I suppose you wouldn't."

"No more than you could. She was called Minnie Reed, and she came to live not far ways off from where my aunt lived. She had a widowed mother along with her, and they didn't lack for means. My old lady took to Mrs. Reed, and presently I began to make chances for seeing Minnie. In a way it was her great cleverness, more than herself, that took me first. I was all for cleverness at that time, Dinah—all for knowledge; and I found that Minnie Reed had got a lot of book learning. Her mother explained she'd been educated above her station, and so on; and she certainly had. Her very speech was nice—far ways above what you'd expect. And from admiring her cleverness, I got to admire her. She had a bit of money, too—a thousand pounds put away. Her mother told my aunt that; and she took good care to tell me.

"Looking back I can't say much about what I felt. I only knew I was very wishful to win her if possible, and I soon found she was agreeable.

Always pleasant, cool, collected she was. She liked me and had an easy manner; yet always held herself a cut above me. She never said so, perhaps she didn't even think so, but she let me feel, somehow, that was in her mind. Not that I cared. I felt she was superior, along of education and natural quick wits. An old head on young shoulders she had. I do believe that she cared for me, and felt happy to think she was going to push on my business. She took it up with all her wits, and soon showed that she was a masterpiece at it. She understood more about money than I did, and she soon showed me how to make more. In fact, her thoughts soared higher than mine from the start, and I knew I'd have a rare right hand in that matter.

"It suited me very well that she didn't want a lot of love-making, for I was busy as a bee and not given to that sort of thing. In fact she made it clear in words. For she'd thought about that, like most subjects. She held the business of love-making and babies and so on was only a small part of life, and that men thought a lot too much about that side of marriage. She said certain things with an object, and gave me an opening to ax a few questions; but I was too green to take up the hint, and she said afterwards that she thought I agreed with her.

"We were married and started in the train for our honeymoon. We was going to Exeter for a week and then coming home again, for neither of us had much use for honeymooning, but felt full of business.

"We had a carriage to ourselves by the kindness of the guard—a Barnstaple man. And we talked. And when I got out of the train at

Exeter, I left her; and I've never seen her again and never shall. She was a stranger woman to me for evermore."

He was silent for a time, but Dinah said nothing.

"It was her work, not mine. She'd got a sense of what she owed me, I suppose, or else a fear of something. Yet, looking back, I often wondered she troubled to tell me the truth, for she knew well enough I was much too inexperienced and ignorant to have found it out. She might have lied. Anyway it's to her credit that she told me. Not that she would have done so if she'd known how I should take it. She reminded me of her nest-egg and how I'd asked her how she came by it, and how she'd said an uncle left it to her under his will. 'That's not true,' she said to me. 'And I don't want to begin our married life with a secret between us, specially as it happens to be such a trifle. I dare say some fools would pull a long face,' she said, 'but you ain't that sort, else you'd never have fallen in love with me.' Then she told me that for two years she'd been the mistress of a gentleman at Bristol—a rich, educated man in business there. He'd kept her till he was going to be married, and they parted very good friends and he gave her a thousand pounds. He'd used her very well indeed and never talked any nonsense about marrying her, or anything like that. It was just a bargain, and he had what he wanted and so had she. Then she bent across the carriage and put her arms round my neck and kissed me. But she kissed a stone. I kept my head. I didn't go mad. I didn't curse or let on.

"I put her arms off me and bade her sit down and let me think; and all the passion I felt against

her kept inside me. She looked a pretty thing that day. In pink she was, and if ever a man could swear he looked at a virgin he might have sworn it afore her grey eyes.

"I told her it was all up; and she kept her nerve too. Guard looked in and had a laugh sometimes when the train stopped, and we ruled our faces and grinned back at him.

"She began by trying hard to change me. She poured out a flood of reasons; she used her quick brains as she'd never used them afore. But she kept as keen and cool as a dealer to market, and when she found I wasn't going on with it she bided still a bit and then asked me what I was going to do.

"That I couldn't tell her for the minute. 'Us'll begin at the beginning,' I said, 'and have every step clear. You've got my name now, and you're my wife in the law, and you've got your rights. And I shan't come between you and them. But my love for you is dead. You've gone. You're less to me now than the trees passing the window. You'll live your life and I'll live mine,' I said to her; 'but you're outside mine in future and I'm outside yours.'

"That can't be,' she said. 'I've got a claim, and if you turn me down you've got to think of my future as well as your own.' I granted that and promised her she need not trouble for herself. Being what I am, for good or evil, I saw this blow would fall on me, not her. She wouldn't miss me so long as everything else was all right, and my feelings were such that I wasn't particular mindful of my ruin at that minute. I got a sudden, fierce longing to cut a loss and be out of it. And that first driving impulse in me

—to get away from her and breathe clean air—stuck to me after twenty-four hours had passed. Once knowing what she'd been, my love for her went out like a candle. That may be curious, but so it was. I didn't fight myself over it, or weaken, or hunger for her back. Never once did I. She was gone and couldn't have been more gone if she'd dropped dead at my feet. All my passion was a passion to get out of her sight.

"She tried with every bit of her cleverness to change me. Yes, she tried hard, and I saw the wonder of her brains as I'd never even yet seen them. She made a lot clear. She scorned the thing we call sin. She said to give a man what she'd given was no more than to give another woman's baby a drink from her breast if it was thirsty. She talked like that. She said she never loved the man as she loved me, and she prayed for me to take a higher line and not be paltry. But it was all wind in the trees for me and didn't shake me by a hair."

He stopped for a moment and Dinah asked him a question. She had followed him word by word, her mouth open, her eyes fixed upon his face.

"If she'd told you before instead of after, would it have put you off her?"

"Yes, it would," he said. "God's my judge, it would have made all the difference between wanting her and loathing her. I'm the sort of man that could no more have brooked it than I'd willingly touch a foul thing. Where women are concerned, I may have wanted better bread than is made of wheat—I don't know and I don't care; but that's me. And nothing could change me. She tried hard enough—part for my own sake,

I do believe, and part for hers. She was wonderful and I'll grant it. She knew me well enough to waste not a minute of her time in coaxing, or tears, or any foolery. She just kept to the argument as close and keen as a man.

"She said a strange thing—bare-faced it seemed to me then, but I dare say, in strict fairness to her, I might have been shook by it. She reminded me that it was what that blasted, rich man had taught her had made her what she was. She said he'd lifted her above her class and woke up her brains and educated her with books and lessons; and that what had drawn me was just what she had to thank him for. She said, 'You'd never have looked at me twice for myself. A pretty face means nothing to you. It was my sharpened sense took you; and now you turn round and fling me off for just what made you marry me.' Cunning as a snake she was—the wisdom and the poison both. Or so it seemed to me. But what she said didn't alter the facts. I wasn't built to take another's leavings.

"She worked at me till we were very nearly to Exeter. Then she stopped and said it was up to me to say what I intended. And I told her I'd do all that was right, and more. Her talk, you see, had done this much. It made me understand that from her point of view—hateful though it was—she had her rights. And so I bade her take her luggage to one inn and I'd go to another; and next day I wrote to her that she'd get a letter from me when I'd looked all round and decided what was proper to do. She left me still hoping; I could see that. But she didn't hope no more when she got my letter."

"You never went back on it?"

"Only once, for five minutes, that first night in bed, turning over my future life and hers. For five minutes a thought did creep in my mind, and for five minutes it stuck. It was such a thought as might have been expected, I dare say—a sort of thought any man might think; but it stank in five minutes, and I shook it out. And the thought was how would it be if I said to her she must give up her nest-egg and get rid of it for evermore, and then I—— But what real difference did that make? None."

"Perhaps she wouldn't have let it go," said Dinah.

He nodded. It was another woman's view.

"Perhaps she wouldn't. She earned it—eh? Next morning I wrote and said what I was going to do. It was pretty definite and that was where people said I was mad; but, looking back, I can swear I'd do the same again. The thought was to be away and out of it. Everything I'd done up to then tumbled down that day. It was all gone together—not only her, but everything. I dare say that was curious, but that's how I felt. I only asked for the clothes on my back, and to get away in 'em and never see a bit of the past no more and begin again."

"You'd feel like that."

"I did. I took a line she couldn't quarrel with. She made a fight; but business was her god, and though I was a fool in her eyes that didn't make her inclined to play the fool. She hadn't to drive a bargain, or any such thing. I cut the ground from under her feet, threw up the lot, handed her over the business, lock, stock and barrel, and was gone, like a dead man out of mind, so soon as I'd signed the proper papers."

"She let you?"

"She couldn't do no otherwise, and as what I planned was well within her sense of what was right and proper, she made no question. She wrote, when all was fixed up, that she hoped I'd live to change my mind and come back to her and very thankful she would be if I was to.

"We were in Exeter for a week and came and went from a lawyer's—but never there together. I ordained to give her what I'd got and leave her to do as she pleased. She was sorry I saw it like that; but the sense of the woman never allowed nothing to come between her and reason. The lawyer tried to change me too. He was a very kindly man. But it went through. She took over the dairy and carried on my engagements to my aunt, and no doubt developed the shop same as I meant to. She gave out I'd gone away for a bit and might be back in a month. I don't suppose anybody ever heard more, and when I didn't come back she had a search made for me all very right and regular; but I'd gone beyond finding, and she carried on. Only my aunt knew I'd gone of my own accord; but why I'd gone, only one creature beside my wife ever knew; and that was her mother; and I doubt not she sided with her daughter. I dare say there's a lot more the other side could tell; but I made a clean cut. I dropped every creature and began again out of their reach. That's the story of me, Dinah. I've most forgotten many of the details myself now. It's seven and a half years ago. I saw in a North Devon paper my old aunt was dead, and so Minnie's free of them payments and standing alone."

There was silence between them for more than

a minute. Then Dinah spoke, went back to his first word and asked a question.

“D’you call that being married?”

“Yes—that’s my marriage. There ain’t much more to tell. I was for going to Canada, and started with fifty pounds of money, which was all I kept. I was going to get a state-aided passage from London and begin again out there. But chance willed different, and the accident of meeting a stranger in the train kept me in England after all. Chance done me a very good turn then. A farmer got in the train at Taunton and between Taunton and Bath, fate, or what you like to call it, willed I went to that man. We got talking, and I told him I was going abroad, being skilful at cows and the butter and milk business. He got interested at that and reckoned I might be such a man as he needed; but I said plainly that I was cutting losses, and my past must bide out of sight, and I’d best to go foreign in my opinion. By that time, however, he’d got a fancy he’d trust me. He only asked me one question and that was if, on my honour, I could tell him I’d done no dishonest or wicked thing from which I was trying to escape. And I swore by God I had not. He believed me, and when, a day or two later, I told him the whole story, he didn’t say whether in his judgment I’d done right or wrong, but he granted that I’d done right from my point of view and thought no worse of me for it. I hesitated a bit at his offer; but I liked him, somehow, from the first, and I was cruel tired, and the thought of getting to work right away was good to me. Because I knew by then that there was nothing like working your fingers to the bone to dull pain of mind and make you sleep.

"My life with him is another tale. I look back upon it with nothing but content. I did well by him, and he was as good as a father to me. It's near eighteen months ago he died, and his two sons carried on. Very nice men, and they wanted me to stop; but I couldn't bide when the old chap dropped out. He left me two hundred pounds under his will, Dinah; and his sons didn't object that I should take it, for they were well-to-do and liked me. Then I saw Joe's advertisement in the paper and had a fancy to come back alongside where I was born."

"And Mrs. Maynard never found you?"

"No; but she isn't Mrs. Maynard. Maynard's not my name and Lawrence ain't my name."

She sighed.

"Man!" she said, "you be sinking and sinking—oh, my God, you be sinking out of my sight! I thought you was one creature, and now you be turning into a far-away thing under my eyes."

"I don't feel like that. I'm Lawrence Maynard to myself, Dinah. T'other be dead and in his grave. My name was Courtier. There's some of the family about on Dartmoor yet. My great-grandfather was a Frenchman—a soldier took in the wars more than a hundred year ago. And the Moor folk traded at the war prisons to Princetown, so he got to know a good few at prison market. Then he was tokened to a farmer's daughter, and after the peace he married her and stopped in England and started a family."

"What's your other real name, then?"

"Gilbert, same as my father."

"Us must be going," she said.

"Shall I tell her to hot some more tea for you?"

"No—I don't want no tea."

He drank his cold cup at a draught and pressed her to eat a little; but she shook her head.

"I'll see you home by New Bridge and then get up back through the woods, Dinah."

"I can travel alone."

"No, you mustn't do that."

She said very little during the long tramp through a night-hidden land. The darkness, the loneliness, the rustle of the last dead leaves and the murmur of the wind chimed with her thoughts. She seemed hardly conscious of the man at her side. He strove once or twice to talk, but found it vain and soon fell into silence. At New Bridge Dinah spoke.

"You'll always be 'Lawrence' to me," she said. "Tell me this. When are you going to see me again, after I've thought a bit?"

"Like you to want to. We can meet somewhere."

"You love me?"

"Yes; as I never thought I could love anything. But how should you love me any more?"

She did not answer immediately. For some distance they walked by the river. Then they reached a fork of the road where their paths divided; for here Dinah climbed to the left by a steep lane that would bring her to Lower Town and home, while Maynard must ascend into the woods.

They stopped.

"Will you do this?" she said. "Will you put the story of your life before Enoch Withycombe?"

"Why, Dinah?"

"To get his opinion on it—all—every bit."

"Yes, if you like."

"I do like. I'm very wishful to know what a man such as him would say."

"It's been in my mind to tell him about myself before to-day."

"I wish you had."

"He shall hear it. I set great store by his sense. He might—— Can you get home from here? I'll come with you if you like."

"No."

"You've forgiven me?"

"Be there anything to forgive?"

"I don't know. And yet I do. Yes, you'll find you've got to forgive me for ever loving you, Dinah."

"You be life—you be life to me," she said.

"Don't say small things like that. I'm only being sorry for all you've had to suffer all these years and years. I'll go on being sorry for you a long time yet. Then I'll see if I'm angry with you after. I can only think of one thing at a time."

She tramped up the hill, and he stood until her footfall had ceased. Then he went his own way and had climbed to within half a mile of Buckland, when a strange thing happened. He heard the winding of a hunter's horn. Through the darkness, for all listening ears came the melodious note. It rang out twice, clear and full; and kennelled hounds a mile distant caught it and bayed across the night—a farewell good to the heart of Enoch Withycombe if he had heard them.

CHAPTER XXI

FUNERAL

ENOCH WITHYCOMBE had always promised to sound his horn again in sight of his end, and three days after he woke the echoes of the Vale he died. On the night when his music vibrated over hill and valley for the last time, Melinda had pushed his chair to the cottage door; but when Lawrence called on the following Sunday afternoon, the old hunter had already drifted into a comatose state, and the story Maynard had hoped to tell was never heard by him.

A bitter grey day dawned for a funeral attended by unusual mourners. The dead sportsman's master had made a promise and he kept it. Hounds did not meet that day; but the master, the huntsman and the whipper-in both clad in pink, and two brace of hounds were at the grave-side—a bright flash of colour in the sombre little crowd that assembled.

Melinda Honeysett and her brother, Jerry, were chief mourners, while behind them came the fox-hunters; and of those who followed, some took it amiss to see such an addition to a funeral; while others held it seemly and fitting.

Arthur Chaffe and Ben Bamsey were both at the grave-side; while Joe Stockman came

with Susan, Maynard and Thomas Palk. John Bamsey and Lawrence were among the bearers. They had also helped to carry the dead man from his home to the grave, for it was a walking funeral. Half a dozen private carriages followed it, and Melinda was bewildered to arrange the many gifts of flowers that came to her from her father's old friends of the countryside.

"Fox-hunters have long memories seemingly," said Jerry to his sister, as they read the cards attached to wreath and cross.

After the funeral was ended and when Enoch lay beside his wife, on the north of the church tower, it happened that Maynard found Dinah Waycott beside him in the press of the people. She had come with the Bamseys and, knowing that he would be there, now reached his side, bade him 'good day,' and unseen put a letter into his hand.

For a moment he picked up the thread of their conversation, where they had left it on the night by Dart River a week before.

"I couldn't tell him—he was too far gone next day," he said quietly, taking her letter.

"No matter," she answered, and then moved away.

The crowd drifted down the lanes and up the lanes. The men in pink mounted their horses and rode away with the hounds. Enoch's old master also departed on horseback, as did a dozen other men and several women. Soon only Melinda and Jerry were left to see the grave filled in and dispose the wreaths upon it. Mr. Chaffe kept them company.

"A magnificent funeral despite the dogs," he declared, "and Buckland did ought to be proud."

But Jerry was weeping and paid no heed; while his sister also, now that the strain had passed and the anticlimax come, hid not her tears.

Soosie-Toosie, her father and the two labouring men walked home together and Joe uttered a vain lament.

"A thousand pities the man's sailor son, Robert, couldn't be there," he said. "It would have been a fine thing for him to see what his father was thought of. And he'd have supported Melinda. She stood up very well and firm; but I know she'll miss him a terrible lot—her occupation gone you may say; for there's nobody leaves such a gap as an invalid that's called for your nursing for years."

Joe was in a mood unusually pensive.

"I'm looking forward," he said. "In that great rally of neighbours there was a lot of old blids from round about—a good few up home eighty years old I shouldn't wonder; and such was the bitter cold in the churchyard that you may be certain death was busy sowing his seeds. I hope to God I be all right, and I thank you for making me put on my heavy clothes, Soosie."

Palk walked behind them and talked fitfully to Maynard.

"'Twill ruin Christmas," said Thomas. "He was a famous man and there'll be a gloom fall over the place now he's dropped out."

"It won't make any difference," answered the younger.

"It may make a valiant lot of difference, and that nearer home than you think for," answered Palk.

But Maynard shook his head.

"There's nothing in it. Joe won't offer for

her — Mrs. Honeysett — if that's what you're thinking; and if he did, 'tis doubtful if she'd take him. Enoch didn't set very high store on master."

"He knew him. And he knew this—that a man who worked his only child like Stockman works his would make his wife a proper beast of burden."

"Everybody's selfish. I dare say when the news of the rise reaches us presently, you'll think better of him."

Then Stockman called Lawrence and Susan fell back to the horseman.

"He wants to tell Maynard about some ideas he's got," she explained.

"Be master under the weather about this death, or is he only pretending?" asked Thomas bluntly.

"He's a very feeling creature is father," answered the woman. "'Tis a landmark gone; and death's death."

"Mrs. Honeysett kept her face very steady."

"She did."

"She've got the cottage for her life, however."

"Yes. Squire's left it to her for naught, so long as she likes to bide there."

"A deep thought—how long she will bide there."

"Yes, it is. Jerry will be gone, come presently; but she'll have a neighbour. There's a widow man and his daughter took the cottage—the haunted house that joins hers. He's a new gardener to Buckland Court and don't fear ghosts."

"So I heard tell."

They were silent, and then Thomas, now on very friendly terms with Susan, asked a question.

"Will it make a difference to Mr. Stockman, Mrs. Honeysett being set free of her father, miss?"

"I couldn't tell you, Tom. I've axed myself that question. But I'm not in father's thoughts."

"Would you like to see him wed?"

"Yes, I think I would. A nice wife would add to his comfort."

"A wife—nice or otherwise—would open your father's eyes," declared Thomas. "In all respect I say it; but where you be concerned, he's got to make such a habit of you, and got to take you so terrible much like he takes his breakfast, or his boots, or any other item of his life, that it would be a very good thing if he found out what you was."

"He don't undervalue me, I hope," answered Susan.

"But he do undervalue you cruel, and for that reason I'd be very pleased indeed if he was to get a woman for himself. Because no female he'm likely to find will show your Christian power of taking everything lying down. In fact no woman as ever I heard tell about can rise to such heights in that partickler as you."

"If a wife was so fond of him as what I am, she'd treat him so faithful as what I do," argued Soosie-Toosie; but Thomas assured her that she was mistaken.

"Don't think it," he said. "No wife ever I heard tell about would drudge for nought same as you. However, I be going beyond my business, and no doubt you'll tell me so. But 'tis only on your account, I assure you."

"I know it, Tom. But father's built in a higher mould than you and me. He's born to command,

and I'm born to obey. Us generally do what's easiest, to save trouble; and if he was to marry again, he'd still be born to command, and any woman, knowing him well enough to take him, would understand that."

"They might, or they might not," argued Mr. Palk. "When a man goes courting, he hides a lot in that matter and, strong though the governor may be, there's women very well able to hold their own against any man born; and Melindy Honeysett is one. But it may happen. The mills of God may be grinding for it; and then master will look at you, and the scales will fall from his eyes, I expect."

As soon as he was alone, Lawrence Maynard read the letter from Dinah. But the note was very brief. She committed herself to no opinions and only begged him to come to her in Lizwell Woods, a mile or two from her home, on the following Sunday afternoon.

"I'll be where the Webburn rivers run together, so soon after three o'clock as I may," she said.

CHAPTER XXII

AT WATERSMEET

DINAH WAS FIRST at the tryst. The lonely, naked woods swept round her and she sat on a fallen trunk not far from where the Webburn rivers shot the grey forest with light and foamed together beneath the feet of trees. The day was dull and windy, with rain promised from the south. Withered beech leaves whirled about Dinah's feet in little eddies, then rushed and huddled away together in hurtling companies—with a sound like a kettle boiling over, thought she. Her mind was not wholly upon Maynard, for Joe Stockman's gloomy prophecy had come true in one case and Mr. Bamsey was indisposed from a chill caught at the funeral.

A smudge of black appeared in the woods and Maynard stood on the east bank of the river. Dinah rose and waved to him; then he ascended the stream until a place for crossing appeared. Here he leapt from stone to stone and was soon beside her. They wandered away and he found a spot presently, where the ground was dry with fallen needles from a spruce above it.

"Sit here," he said.

She had not spoken till now, save to tell him her foster-father was ill. But when they sat side

by side, with the bole of the great spruce behind them, she answered all the questions he wanted to put in one swift action. For a moment she looked at him and her face glowed; and then she put her arms round his neck and kissed him.

"Dinah—d'you mean it?" he said. "Oh, d'you mean all that?"

"I want you; I can't live my life without you, Lawrence."

"After what I've told you?"

His arms were round her now and he had paid her fiercely for her kiss.

"What is marriage? I've been puzzling about it. And if you knew what I'd been feeling, you'd be sorry for me. But you've only been sorry for yourself, I expect, you selfish man."

He did not answer. He had released her, but was still holding one of her hands.

"I'd make you a good wife, Lawrence," she said.

"By God you would!"

"And what is marriage, then? Why d'you tell me you're married to her—any more than I'm married to John Bamsey?"

"Marriage is a matter of law, and a man can only marry one wife."

"And what's a wife, then?"

"The woman you are married to—she that's got your name."

"Would you say your wife was married?"

"Certainly she is."

"A widow, then?"

"Not a widow if her husband is alive."

"Then why d'you say that Gilbert Courtier died when Lawrence Maynard came to life? If Gilbert Courtier's dead, then his wife is a widow."

Her literal interpretation was not a jest. He perceived that Dinah presented no playful mood. For a moment, however, he could hardly believe she was in earnest.

"If it was as easy as that," he said.

"How d'you feel to it, then?"

"God knows I want one thing afore all things and above all things: and that's to have you for my own—my own. And whether I can, or can't, my own you will be from this hour, since you want to be my own."

"And I will have it so. You're my life now—everything."

"But you can't make me less than I am. It's no good saying that Gilbert Courtier's dead; and though I change my name for my own comfort, that's not to change it against the facts."

"D'you want to go back to it, then?"

"Not I. I'll never go back, and 'tis no odds to me what I'm called; but a wife's a wife, and my future wife must stand safe within the law—for her own safety—and her husband's honour."

She stared at this.

"D'you feel that things like safety, or the law, matter?"

"To you—not to me."

"What do I know about the law—or care? D'you think I'm a coward? You've only got one name for me, and ban't the name I love best in the world good enough? Who else matters to you, if you're Lawrence Maynard to me? And what else matters to you if I love you? Words! What are words alongside the things they stand for? And whose honour's hurt?"

"You feel all that?"

“Not if you don’t. But you do.”

His own standards failed for the time and he said somewhat more than he meant. Such love as Dinah’s, such certainty as Dinah’s, made doubt, built on old inherited instincts, look contemptible. Trouble had formerly shaken these deep foundations; now happiness and pride at his splendid achievement similarly shook them.

“Yes I do,” he said. “I’d let all go down the wind afore I’d lose what I’ve won. I can keep off words as easy as you; and the word that would come between me and such love as I’ve got for you was never spoke and never will be. Words are dust and can go to the dust. But——”

He had recollected a fact beyond any power of words to annul.

“There’s a hard and fast reality, Dinah, and it can’t be argued down, or thought away.”

“Then let it go—same as everything else have got to go. There’s only one reality: that you and me are going to live together all our lives. What fact can stand against that? If facts were as big as the Beacon, they’re naught against that fact.”

“You make me feel small,” he said, “and love so big as that would make any man feel small, I reckon. And for the minute I’ll put away the machinery that must be set running when a man wants to wed a woman.”

“What’s machinery to us? We didn’t love each other by machinery and us shan’t wed by machinery.”

“Us can’t wed without machinery.”

“You say that! Ban’t us wed a’ready? Be the

rest of it half so fine as what brought us together, and made us know that our lives couldn't be lived apart? Ban't you wed to me, Lawrence?"

"I am," he said, "and only death will end it. But there's more than that for you; and so there's got to be more for me. And if I'm going to be small now and talk small, it's for you I do, not for myself. You're a sacred thing to me and holy evermore."

"And you be sacred to me," she said. "You've made all men sacred and holy to me; and you've made me feel different to the least of 'em, because they be built on the same pattern as you. I swear I feel kinder and better to everybody on earth since I know you loved me so true."

"It's this, then—a bit of the past. When I first came here I felt, somehow, that in Stockman I'd had the good luck to hit on just such another as my old master up country. He seemed to share the same large outlook and understanding, so I told him about myself, just like I told the other; and he was just the same about it. In fact, he went further than my old master, and agreed with me right through and said that if more people had the pluck to cut a loss the world would go smoother. He said, 'To let sleeping dogs lie be a very wise rule; and to let sleeping bitches lie be still wiser.' But I know a lot more about Joe Stockman now than I did then; and, if the time was to come again, I wouldn't tell him. He'd never tell again, or anything like that; but he knows the truth."

Dinah admitted that Mr. Stockman was a serious difficulty.

"What would trouble him wouldn't be that; but the thought of losing you," she said. "That

would make him nasty, no doubt, and quick to take a line against you."

"Joe knows about Barnstaple. He said to me once, 'Good men come from Barnstaple; my father did.' He has relatives up that way. But I only told him I knew the place; I never said I'd come from there."

She was silent for a moment, staring straight before her with her elbows on her knees, her chin on her hands.

"All this means," he continued, "that we can't do anything small, or cast dust in people's eyes about it, even if we were tempted to, which we're not. For the minute we must mark time. Then we'll see as to the law of the subject and a good few things. All that matters to me is that you can love me so well as ever, knowing where I stand."

"As to doing anything small, nothing's small if the result of it is big," she said. "There's no straight wedding for us here anyway, but Buckland ain't the world, and what we've got to satisfy be ourselves, not other people. I hate to hear you say we'll see about the law. People like us did ought to be our own law."

"We've got enough to go on with, and we've got ourselves to go on with—everything else is nought when I look at you."

They talked love and explored each other's hearts, very willing to drop reality for dreams. They were a man and woman deeply, potently in love, and both now made believe, to the extent of ignoring the situation in which they really stood. Time fled for them and the early dusk came down, so that darkness crept upon them from every side simultaneously. Rain fell, but they did not perceive it under the sheltering

fir. They set off anon and went down the river bank.

"Now we must go back into the world for a bit," said Dinah, "and we'll think and see what our thoughts may look like to each other in a week. Then we'll meet here once more, unbeknown'st. For I reckon we'd better not moon about together in the sight of people overmuch now."

Yet they did not separate before they ran into one who knew them both. Thomas Palk met them on a woodland road below Watersmeet.

He stood at the edge of an ascent to Buckland.

"Hullo, Tom! What's brought you out this wet evening?" asked Maynard, and the elder explained that he had been to Green Hayes for news of Mr. Bamsey.

"Master was wishful to hear tidings," he said. "And I had nought on hand and did his pleasure. The doctor was along with Benjamin Bamsey when I got there, and said he was pretty ill."

"Good night, then. I must be gone," said Dinah, and without more words left the men and started running.

Palk turned to Lawrence.

"I shouldn't wonder if Bamsey was a goner," he prophesied.

"He's a tough old chap. He'll come through with such care as he'll get. But Stockman said how that biting day might breed trouble among the grey heads. He was right."

He talked with a purpose to divert Tom's mind from the fact that he had met him walking alone with Dinah; but he need not have felt apprehension: Mr. Palk was immersed in his own thoughts.

"Stockman always looks ahead—granted," he

answered as they climbed the hill together, "and for large views and putting two and two together, there's not his equal. But self-interest is his god, though he foxes everybody it ain't. He hides it from most, but he don't hide it from me, because the minute you've got the key to his lock you see how every word and thought and deed be bent in one direction."

"In honesty there's not much for you and me to quarrel with," said Maynard.

"If you and me was everybody, I wouldn't feel what I do. He don't quarrel with us, though he often says a thing so pleasant and easy that you don't know you're cut till you find the blood running. But we ain't everybody. He's fairly civil to us, because he don't mean to lose us if he can help it; but what about her as can't escape? How does he treat his own flesh and blood?"

Maynard was astonished. He had not given Thomas credit for much power of observation.

"Would you say Miss was put upon?" he asked.

"God's light!" swore Mr. Palk. "And be you a thinking man and can ask that? Have you got eyes? If Orphan Dinah had to work like her, would you ax me if she was put upon?"

The challenge disturbed Lawrence.

"What's Miss Waycott to do with it?" he asked.

"Nought. Nobody's got nothing to do with it but master. And he's got everything to do with it; and he's a tyrant and a damned slave-driver, and treats her no better than a plough, or a turnip cutter."

They were silent and Thomas asked a question.

"Have you ever heard tell they 'port-wine'

marks be handed down from generation to generation?"

"No, I never did."

"I heard Stockman tell Melindy Bamsey they was."

"I dare say it might be so."

"And yet again, when the subject come up at Ashburton, a publican there said that if a man or woman suffered from such a thing they was doomed never to have no children at all."

"A woman might," answered Lawrence, "because, if they're afflicted that way, they'd be pretty sure to bide single. But it would be a nice question if a marked man couldn't get childer."

Thomas turned this over for ten minutes without answering. Then the subject faded from his mind and he flushed another.

"What about our rise?" he said.

"We'll hear after Easter."

They discussed the probable figure. Maynard seemed not deeply interested; but Palk declared that his own future movements largely depended upon Mr. Stockman's decision.

CHAPTER XXIII

IN A SICK-ROOM

DINAH'S THOUGHTS concentrated on Lawrence Maynard as she hastened home. She felt a little puzzled at a streak of mental helplessness that seemed to have appeared in him. He groped, instead of seeing the way as clearly as she did. For him, what he had to tell her seemed serious; for her, as she now considered it, the fact that Mr. Stockman knew Maynard was married sank in significance. That it made a simple situation more complex she granted; but it did not alter the situation; and if it was impossible to be married at Buckland, there would be no difficulty, so far as she could see, in being married elsewhere.

She had examined the situation more deeply, however, before she reached home and perceived that Lawrence, after all, was not groping, but rather standing still before a very definite obstacle. They could not be married at Buckland; but could they be married anywhere else without first vanishing far beyond reach and hearing of Buckland? For him that was easy; for her impossible, unless she deliberately cut herself off from her foster-father and, not only that, but prevented him from knowing where she might

be. For it was idle to tell him, or anybody, that she had married Maynard, while Mr. Stockman could report from Maynard's own lips that he was already married.

Now indeed Dinah's soul fainted for a few moments. She hated things hid; she loved events to be direct and open; but already some need for hiding her thought, if not her actions, had become imperative, and now she saw a complication arising that she had never taken into account: the collision between Lawrence and Ben Bamsey. What might be right and honest enough to her and her lover must emphatically be neither righteous nor thinkable to him.

For a season life was now suspended at the bedside of an old man, and Dinah returned home to plunge at once into the battle for her foster-father's existence. Ben rapidly became very ill indeed, with congestion of the lungs, and for a time, while in the extremity of suffering, his usual patient understanding deserted him and facts he strove to conceal in health, under conditions of disease appeared. They were no secret to Faith Bamsey and she was schooled to suffer them, being able the easier so to do because she knew the situation was not Dinah's fault. Indeed they created suffering for the girl also. But to Jane, her father's now unconcealed preference for Dinah, his impatience when she was absent and his reiterated desire to have her beside him, inflamed open wounds and made her harsh. Her mother argued with her half-heartedly, but did not blame her any more than she blamed Dinah.

One only stood for Dinah and strove to better the pain of her position. Tossed backward and forward still, now, when at last he was minded

to accept the situation and admit to his own mind the certainty he could never win her, a ray of hope flushed wanly out of the present trouble; a straw offered for him to clutch at. John Bamsey came to Green Hayes daily, to learn how his father did, and he heard from Jane how Dinah was preferred before his mother or herself. Then, inspired by some sanguine shadow, he took Dinah's part and let her know that he understood her difficulties and was opposing his sister on her account.

He quarrelled with Jane for Dinah's sake and told Dinah so; and she perceived, to her misery, how he was striving yet again to win her back at any cost. Thus another burden was put upon her and she found that only in the sick-room was any peace.

Mr. Bamsey much desired to live, and proved a good patient from the doctor's point of view; but, as he reached the critical hours of his disease, his only cry was for Dinah and his only wish appeared to be that he should hold her hand. Thus sometimes she had to sit beside him while his wife did nurse's work. The torture was sustained; and then came a morning when, still clear in his mind, Mr. Bamsey felt that he might not much longer remain so. He then expressed a wish for his family to come round him, while he detailed his purposes and intentions.

John was also present at this meeting, and when Dinah desired to leave them together, he and not his father bade her stop.

"You're one of us," he said. "Sit where you are and don't leave go his hand, else he'll be upset."

The sufferer had little to say.

"'Tis all in my will," he told them. "But I'm

wishful to speak while I can; and if mother has got anything against, there's time to put it right. All mine is hers for her life—all. But I'll ax her, when each of you three come to be married, to hand each five hundred pounds. That won't hurt her. She'll bide here, I hope; and presently, when Jane weds, it would be very convenient if Jerry was to come here and go on with the farm. But if mother wants to leave here, then she can sublet. And when mother's called, the money's to be divided in three equal portions for Dinah and John and Jane."

He stopped, panting.

"Heave me up a bit, Dinah," he said.

Nobody spoke and he looked into their faces.

"Well?" he asked impatiently.

"That will do very right and proper, my dear," answered Faith. "Don't you think no more about it. A just and righteous will, I'm sure."

But Jane had left the room and her father observed it.

"Have that woman anything against?" he asked.

"No, no—a very just and righteous will," repeated his wife soothingly. "I could wish you'd trusted me with the capital, father; but there—I'm content."

"I put you first, Faith."

"I've put you first for five-and-twenty years."

"You ban't content?"

"Well content. Rest now. Us'll go and leave you with Dinah Waycott."

She tried to resist using Dinah's surname, but could not. Then she left the room.

"I've done what I thought was my duty, John," said Mr. Bamsey.

"You've never done less. I'm very willing that Dinah should share."

"Try and get a bit of sleep now, my old dear," said Dinah. "And thank you dearly—dearly for thinking on me; but—no matter, you sleep if you can. Will you drink?"

He nodded and she gave him some warm milk.

"I'll drop the blind," she said, and did so.

In her thoughts was already the determination to forgo any legacy under any circumstances. She longed to tell Jane that she meant to do so.

Mr. Bamsey shut his eyes and presently dozed. The steam kettle made a little chattering in the silence, but the sick man's breathing was the loudest sound in the room.

He slept, though Dinah knew that he would not sleep long. To her concern John began talking of what had passed.

He proceeded in undertones.

"Don't think I don't approve what father's done. I do; and I wish to God you'd take two-thirds—mine as well as your own—in fullness of time. Which you would do, Dinah, if you came to me. Why can't you see it?"

"Why can't you, John?"

"What is there for me to see? Nothing, but that you don't know your own mind. Haven't I been patient enough, waiting for you to make it up? Can't you trust me? You loved me well enough back-along, and what did I ever do to choke you off? You bide here, and you understand I'm not changed and won't be blown away by all the rumours and lies on people's tongues; and you can let me live on in hell—for what? You don't know. If you had a reason, you'd be just enough to grant I ought to hear it."

"Don't say that, Johnny. You never asked me for a reason more than I gave you from the first. I told you on New Bridge that I was bitter sorry, but I found my feeling for you was not the sort of love that can make a woman marry a man. And that was the sole reason then. And that reason is as good now as ever it was."

"It's no reason to anybody who knows you like what I do. Haven't you got any pity, or mercy in you, Dinah? Can you go on in cold blood ruining my life same as you are doing—for nothing at all? Why did you stop loving me?"

"I never began, John; and if you say that reason's not enough, then—then I'll give you another reason. For anything's better than going on like this. To ask me for pity and mercy! Can't you see what you're doing—you, who was so proud? D'you want a woman to give herself up to you for pity and mercy? Be you sunk to that?"

"I'm sunk where it pleased you to sink me," he said; "and if you knew what love was, pity and mercy would rise to your heart to see anybody sinking that you could save."

"I do know what love is," she answered. "Yes, I know it now, though I never did till now. When I begged you to let me go, I didn't know anything except what I felt for you wasn't what it ought to be; but, since then, things are different; and I do well know what love is."

"That's something. If you've larned that, I'll hope yet you'll come to see what mine is."

"You can't love a man because he loves you, John. You may be just as like to love a man who hates you, or love where mortal power can't love back—as in your case. Where I've got now be this: I do love a man."

"You thought you loved me. Perhaps you're wrong again and was right before."

"I love a man, and he loves me; and nothing on God's earth will ever keep us apart unless it's death."

"So you think now. I've heard some talk about this and gave them that told it the lie. And I'm most in the mind to give you the lie. I can't forget all you've said to me. It's hard—it's horrible, to think you could ever speak such words to anybody else."

She smiled.

"I don't want to be cruel; I don't want to be horrible, John. But what I've ever said to you was nought—the twitter of a bird—the twaddle of a child. How could I talk love to you, not knowing love? You never heard love from me, because I didn't know the meaning of the word till long after us had parted for good and all. Find a woman that loves you—you soon might—then you'll hear yourself echoed."

"Who is he?"

She expected this and was prepared. None must know that she loved Lawrence Maynard—least of all John Bamsey. He would be the first to take his news red hot to Falcon Farm and Joe Stockman.

"I wish to Heaven I could tell you, Johnny, Yes, I do. I'd like best of all to tell you, and I'll never be quite, quite happy, I reckon, until you've forgiven me for bringing sorrow and disappointment on you. 'Tis not the least of my hopes that all here will forgive me some day; for I couldn't help things falling out as they have, and I never wanted to be a curse in disguise to foster-father, or any of you, same as I seem to

be. You can't tell—none of you—how terrible hard it is."

"You're wriggling away from it," he said. "Who's the man? If there's any on earth have the right to know that much, it's me."

"So you have—I grant it. And if it ever comes to be known, you'll be the first to hear, John. But it can't be known yet awhile, for very good reasons. My life's difficult and his life's difficult—so difficult that it may never happen at all. But I pray God it will; and it shall if I can make it happen."

"You hide his name from me, then?"

"What does his name matter? I've only told you so much for the pity you ask. I needn't have gone so far. But I can see what knowing this ought to do for you, John, and I hope it will. You understand now that I care for a man as well, heart and soul and body, as you care for me. And for Christ's sake let that finish it between us. I hate hiding things, and it's bitter to me to hide what I'm proud of—far prouder of than anything that's ever happened to me in all my born days. So leave it, and if there's to be pity and mercy between us—well, you're a man, and you can be pitiful and merciful now."

The turning-point had come for him and he knew that his last hope was dead. This consciousness came not gradually, but in a gust of passion that banished the strongest of him and exalted the weakest.

"Yes," he said, "you're right; it's for men to be merciful. No woman ever knew the meaning of the word. So I'll be a man all through—and there's more goes to a man than mercy for them that have wickedly wronged him."

He forgot where he stood and raised his voice.

"And I'll find him—maybe I know where to look. But I'll find him; and there won't be any mercy then, Dinah Waycott. 'Tis him that shall answer for this blackguard robbery. I can't have you; but, by God, I'll have the price of you!"

He woke his father, and Ben, choking, coughed and spat. Then he heaved himself on his arms and pressed his shoulders up to his ears to ease the suffocation within.

Dinah ministered to him and John went from the sick-room and from the house.

CHAPTER XXIV

'THE REST IS EASY'

BEN BAMSEY survived his illness and had to thank a very painstaking doctor and most devoted nurses for his life. He was unconscious for four-and-twenty hours, and during the fortnight that followed the crisis remained so weak, that it seemed he could never regain strength sufficient to move a hand. Then he began to recover. He prospered very slowly, but there were no relapses, and the definite disaster left by his illness remained unknown to the sufferer himself until the end of his days. Nor did other people perceive it until some months had elapsed.

Meantime it became known to those who had already bidden farewell to the master of Green Hayes that he would live; and not one of all those known to Mr. Bamsey but rejoiced to learn the good news.

On a day some time after Christmas Lawrence Maynard went down to Green Hayes. Life ran evenly at Falcon Farm and Mr. Stockman's first interest at present was his kinsman. Now Lawrence brought a partridge, with directions from Joe that it was to be made into broth for Mr. Bamsey.

He saw Ben's wife and heard that her husband was now safe and would recover.

Faith looked haggard and pale, and Maynard expressed a fear that the ordeal must have been very severe. She admitted it, but declared that such relief as all now felt would be a tonic and swiftly restore them.

"We're about beat," she said, in her usual placid fashion. "We've worked hard and, between us, we've saved my husband with the doctor's help."

He entered, in secret hope of seeing Dinah, whom he had not met for several weeks. Once, however, she had written him a brief note to say that she was well.

Faith Bamsey spoke of Ben and praised his fortitude.

"If he'd wavered, or thrown up the sponge for an hour, he'd have died; but so long as he kept consciousness he determined to live, and even when he thought and felt positive he must go, he never gave up doing the right thing. He won't be the same man, however; we mustn't expect that. He'll be in his bed for a month yet and can't hope to go down house for six weeks. He mustn't think to go out of doors till spring and the warm weather; then it remains to be seen how much of his nature he gets back."

She entertained Maynard for half an hour, while he drank a cup of tea. She did not share Jane's suspicion and dislike of him and felt no objection to the idea of his wedding Dinah and removing her from Lower Town. She was almost minded in his quiet and inoffensive presence to raise the question, and went so far as to tell him Dinah had driven to Ashburton that

afternoon. But he showed no apparent interest in the fact and Faith did not continue on the subject.

With her personal anxieties ended, Mrs. Bamsey found it possible to consider other people again.

"I've never had time to think of what Enoch Withycombe's death meant yet," she said, "because it brought such a terrible time to us. But now we can lift up our heads and look round at other folk again and inquire after the neighbours. Melinda was down axing after my husband a bit ago, but I didn't see her. Jerry comes and goes. I hope Melinda gets over it."

"Mrs. Honeysett comes to see Miss Susan and farmer sometimes."

"Would you say Cousin Joe be looking in that direction now she's free?"

Maynard shook his head.

"I wouldn't. I don't reckon Mr. Stockman will marry again. He's very comfortable."

"Yes—one of them whose comfort depends on the discomfort of somebody else, however."

"So people seem to think. It's a hard home for Miss Susan; but it's her life, and if she's not a cheerful sort of woman, you can't say she's much downcast."

"No—she dursn't be cast down. He wouldn't stand cast-down people round him. Mind to say I'm greatly obliged for the bird, and I hope Ben will eat a slice or two presently. I'll come up over and drink a dish of tea with them afore long. I'm properly withered for want of fresh air."

"I dare say you are, ma'am."

"I saw Enoch Withycombe last week," she said. "The old man was standing down in the Vale, not

far from the kennels—just where you'd think he might be. And always seeing him lying down, as we did, it gave me quite a turn to mark how tall his ghost was."

To see a dead man had not astonished Faith; but the unremembered accident of his height had done so.

"How did he look, Mrs. Bamsey?" asked Maynard.

"I couldn't tell you. The faces that I see never show very clear. You're conscious it is this man, or this woman. You know, somehow, 'tis them, but there's always a fog around them. They don't look the same as what living people look."

"The haunted house that adjoins Mrs. Honeysett's is taken at last," he said. "Mr. Chaffe has been up over a good bit putting it to rights, and they've stripped the ivy and are going to put on a new thatch. It's a very good house really, though in a terrible state, so Mr. Chaffe told master."

"I've heard all about it," she answered. "There's a new gardener come to Buckland Court—a widow man with a young daughter. And he don't care for ghosts—one of the modern sort, that believe nought they can't understand. And as they can't understand much, they don't believe much. So he's took it."

"Harry Ford, he's called," added Lawrence. "A man famous for flower-growing, I believe."

"I'm glad, then. I hate for houses to stand empty."

He talked a little longer and it was impossible for Faith to feel dislike or anger. Had he come between her son and his betrothed—had he been responsible for the unhappy break, she would

have felt differently; but she knew that he was not responsible and she perceived that if he indeed desired to marry Dinah, the circumstance would solve difficulties only ignored by common consent during her husband's illness. She had not heard what John said to Dinah in the sick-room and supposed that now her son must appreciate the situation, since he had quite ceased to speak of Dinah. His purpose, avowed in a passion, had not overmuch impressed Dinah herself; but none the less she meant to warn Lawrence, and now an opportunity occurred to do so.

For Maynard availed himself of Mrs. Bamsey's information, and hearing that Ben's foster-daughter was gone to Ashburton, knew the way by which she would return home and proceeded upon it. He had not seen her since the Sunday afternoon at Lizwell Meet; neither had he written to her, doubting whether it might be wise to do so.

He left Mrs. Bamsey now and presently passed the workshops of Arthur Chaffe at Lower Town, then sank into the valley. By the time he reached New Bridge, Dinah had also arrived there and he carried her parcels for half a mile and returned beside the river.

She was beyond measure rejoiced to see him and he found her worn and weary from the strain of the battle; but its victorious issue went far already to make her forget what was past. She spoke as though they were lovers of established understanding and seemed to take it for granted that only an uncertain measure of time separated them.

This much she implied from the moment of their meeting.

"Don't think, for all I'm so full of dear foster-father, that you've been out of my thoughts, Lawrence," she said. "You ran through it all; and once or twice when he was rambling he named your name and said you was a very good sort of man. And I told him you were; and he hoped we'd come together. He wasn't far from himself when he said it, but only I heard; and whether he ever named you in his fever dreams when I wasn't there—to Jane, or Mrs. Bamsey—I don't know."

"I've just seen his wife," he said. "She's long ways happier for this great recovery. She looked a few questions, but didn't ask them, and you're not bound to answer looks."

Then Dinah told him of John's threats and how he had again begged her to wed.

"I felt things was at a climax then; and I told him straight out that I knew what love was at last. I was gentle and kind to the poor chap; but he wasn't gentle and kind to me. He wanted to know the man, and I said 'twas no odds about the man for the present, and then he lost his temper and swore he'd find him out and do all manner of wicked deeds to him. Only his rage, of course, but so it is and I meant for you to know."

He considered and she spoke again.

"It makes me mad to think all we are to each other have got to be hid, as if we was ashamed of it instead of proud—proud. But Cousin Joe would blaze it out if we were tokened; and now Mr. Withycombe's dead, there's not any in the Vale that would understand."

"Certainly there is not, Dinah—or beyond the Vale, I reckon."

"All's one," she said. "In my eyes you're a free man. Yes, you are. I know what marriage means now, and I know what our marriage will mean."

"It's good to hear you say so," he answered. "My love's so true as yours, Dinah; but there's more mixed with it."

"Away with what be mixed with it! I won't have nought mixed with it, and no thought shall think any evil into it, Lawrence. You couldn't think evil for that matter; but you men be apt to tangle up a straight thought by spinning other thoughts around it. And I won't have that. What be your thoughts that you say are mixed with the future? Can you name them? I lay you can't! But, for that matter, I've been thinking too. And what I think mixes with what I feel, and makes all the better what I feel."

In her eagerness Dinah became rhetorical.

"I was turning over that widow at Barnstaple," she said—"the woman called Courtier, married to a dead man. And I was wondering why I thought twice of her even while I did so; for what be she to me? Not so much as the grass on the field-path I walk over. And what be she to you more than the dead? Be she real, Lawrence? Be she more real and alive to you than Gilbert Courtier, in his grave, beyond sight and sound of living men for evermore? Let the dead lie. You'm alive, anyway, and free in the Eye of God to marry me. And what matters except how soon, and when, and where?"

"You're a brave wonder," he said, "and the man you can love, who would miss you, must be a bigger fool than me. What's left be my work—and a glorious bit of work, I reckon."

"Easy enough anyway."

"For the things to be done, easy enough I doubt not; for the things to be thought, none so easy. Them that sweep fearless to a job, like you, have got to be thought for. And love quickens a man and makes him higher and deeper and better—better, Dinah—than himself—if love's got any decent material to work upon and the man's any good. And pray God that will turn out to be so in my case. A bit ago, when first I came here, I'd have gone bare-headed into this—same as you want to. But I've larned a lot from a dead man since I came to Falcon Farm. Withycombe looked deeper into life than me, being taught by his master and his own troubles and also out of books so to do. God knows it don't lessen the love; but it—how shall I say—it lifts it a bit—into sharper air than a man breathes easy. And afore we come together, I want you to be so strong and sure-footed that nothing shall ever shake you after, and nought that man can do or say——"

"Oh, my dear heart!" she cried, "what do you think I'm made of?"

"I know—I know. It's what I be made of, Dinah, darling. I've got to find that out."

"Let me show you, then. You don't frighten me, Lawrence. I know what you're made of, and I know, if I know nought else, you won't be a finished thing till you share what I'm made of. And I tell you the rest is easy, and you know it's easy so well as me."

But something other than reason possessed his mind at that particular hour. For the moment he could not smother thoughts that were selfless and engaged with Dinah only.

"Yes, I know it," he said. "If the rest goes that way, then the rest is easy enough."

"What other way can it go, unless like our ways to-night—mine up one hill—alone—yours up another hill—alone?"

"Never, by God! I'm only a man."

"And my man! My man!"

They kissed and went their ways, and he considered all that she had said. To run away with Dinah and vanish from this environment would not be difficult. Indeed he had already traversed the ground and considered the details of their departure. He would give notice a month before they disappeared, and while his going might be orderly enough, Dinah's must be in the nature of a surprise. In any case the details were simple enough; there was nothing whatever to prevent their departure when they chose to depart. To Canada, or Australia, they might go when they willed, and he had retraced the old ground and reconsidered the question of state-aided passages and his own resources, which were ample for the purpose.

But not with these things was Maynard's mind occupied when he left Dinah. He was not a man of very complex character, and the independence of thought that had marked the chief action of his life had never been seriously challenged until now. He had been guided by reason in most questions of conduct and never recognised anything above or outside reason in the action that led him to desert his wife on their wedding day; but that same quality it was that now complicated reason and made him doubt, not for his own sake or well-being, but the consequences of such a future for Dinah herself. His wits told him that

no rational human being could offer any sort of objection to their union; and the tribal superstitions that might intervene did not weigh with him. What did was the law of the land, not the religion of the land. Under the law he could not marry Dinah, and no child that might come into the world as a result of their union would be other than a bastard. That would not trouble her; and, indeed, need not trouble anybody, for since Gilbert Courtier, as Dinah had said, no longer existed for them, and was now beyond reach as completely as though indeed he lay in his grave, there could be none to question a marriage entered into between him and Dinah—in Canada, or elsewhere. But there were still the realities and, beyond them, a certain constituent of his own character which now began to assert itself. There persisted in his soul a something not cowardly, but belonging to hereditary instincts of conscience. It made Lawrence want to have all in order, conformable to the laws of the world and his own deeply rooted sense of propriety. He longed, before all else, that the inevitable might also be the reputable, and that no whisper in time to come should ever be raised against his future wife. The desire rose much above a will to mere safety. It was higher than that and belonged to Maynard's ethical values and sense of all that was fitting among men and women. It echoed the same influence and radical conception of conduct that had made him leave his wife on his wedding day; and the fact that no such considerations controlled Dinah promised to increase his shadowy difficulties. He was, for the moment, divided between agreeing with her utterly and feeling that he must allow no natural

instinct and rational argument to let him take advantage of her. And when he looked closer into this, a new difficulty arose, for how could he ever make Dinah understand this emotion, or set clearly before her comprehension what he himself as yet so dimly comprehended?

Her grasp of the situation was clear and lucid. From the moment when she had said in the tea-shop, "D'you call that being married?" he guessed how she was going to feel, and how she would be prepared to act. Dinah's heart was single, and while now Maynard longed with a great longing to find his own heart seeing eye to eye with hers in every particular, he knew that it did not, and he could not be sure that it ever would.

CHAPTER XXV

JOHN AND JOE

JOHN BAMSEY was an intelligent man; but out of the ferment that had so long obscured his vision and upset his judgment, there had been developed a new thing, and a part of him that chance might have permitted to remain for ever dormant, inert and harmless, was now thrust uppermost. He developed a certain ferocity and a sullen and obstinate passion bred from sense of wrong, not only towards Dinah, but the unknown who had supplanted him with her. For that he had been supplanted, despite her assurance to the contrary, John swore to himself. Thus, indeed, only could Dinah's defection be explained; and only so could he justify his purpose and determination to treat this interloper evilly and rob him, at any cost, of his triumph. He hesitated, however, until his sister swore that Maynard was the man, and declared that her father had mentioned him and Dinah together, more than once, when rambling in his fever dreams.

This brought John, from a general vague determination to stand between Dinah and any other man, to the necessity for definite deeds that should accomplish his purpose; and when

he considered how to turn hate into action, he perceived the difficulty.

There was still a measure of doubt whether Maynard might be the culprit, and while now practically convinced, John took occasion, when next at Falcon Farm, to satisfy himself and learn whether Susan, or her father, could add certainty to his suspicion. It seemed impossible that, if such an intrigue were progressing, Joe Stockman should have failed to observe it.

He inquired, therefore, and learned more than he expected to learn.

Susan brewed a pot of tea and Joe listened to Johnny and spoke very definitely upon the subject of his concern.

"You say there's a murmur come to your ear that Orphan Dinah be tokened in secret, John; and as for that I know nought. It's a free country and she's a right to be married if the thought pleasures her; but when you ax if my cowman be the other party to the contract, then you ax me what another busybody here and there have already axed. Lawrence Maynard is a very understanding chap. He thinks a lot of me also, as I happen to know, and he don't keep no secrets from me. 'Tis his fancy, perhaps, that I've got my share of intellects; but so it is, and he's come to me many a time with such cares as the young have got to face, being gifted with the old-fashioned idea that the wisdom of the old may be worth the trouble of hearing. That's a tip for you, Johnny, I dare say. And I can tell you that Maynard, though a kindly creature, as would do any man, woman, or child a good turn, have no thought whatever of marrying. He's not for marriage—that's a cast-iron certainty; and you

might so soon think Thomas Palk would venture—or even sooner.”

“I wouldn’t say that,” argued Susan. “Thomas ain’t blind to women, father. I’ve heard him say things as showed he marked their ways.”

“Mark their ways the male must,” replied Joe. “Their ways be everywhere, and they are half of life, and we admire ’em, according as they do their appointed duty, or shiver at ’em when they get off the rails and make hateful accidents for the men, as Maynard knows they can. But that’s neither here nor there, and, be it as it will, of one thing you can clear your mind, Johnny. If there’s any man after Dinah, it ain’t my cowman.”

“He may be throwing dust in your eyes, however,” argued John Bamsey.

“My eyes be growing dim, worse luck, along of using ’em to work as I would year after year—just for love of work; but they ain’t so dim that the rising generation can throw dust in ’em yet. And now, since you seem so busy about it, let me ax in my turn what it matters to you anyway?”

“Because no living man shall have her while I’m above ground,” answered the younger. “She’s ruined my life, for nothing but cold-blooded wickedness and without any decent reason. And there is a man, and I’ll find him. And Jane says it’s Maynard.”

“Then Jane’s a damned little fool,” answered Joe; “and you’re a damned big one, if you can talk like that.”

“It’s wicked, John,” declared Soosie-Toosie. “You ought to let the dead past bury the dead, I’m sure.”

"Don't you talk," he answered roughly. "You don't know nothing about what it is to love and be robbed. Love, such as I had for Dinah, be a thing too big for you neuter women to understand, and it's no more sense than a bird twittering for you to say anything on the subject."

"Don't you call Soosie-Toosie names, anyhow," warned Joe. "She tells you the truth, John, and you'm making a very silly show of yourself—so funny as clown in a circus, my dear. And most men would laugh at you. But me and Susan are much too kind-hearted to do that. And as to Soosie being a neuter creature, that's great impertinence in you and I won't have it. And thank God there are neuter creatures, to act as a bit of a buffer sometimes between the breeders and their rash and wilful deeds. A pity there ban't more of 'em, for they're a darned sight more dignified and self-respecting than most of the other sort, and they do more good in the world nine times out of ten. You pull yourself together, John, else no decent girl will have any use for you."

"What better than that Dinah should come by a husband and get out of Green Hayes?" asked Susan. "You know very well it would be a good thing for all parties, and, I dare say, you'd very soon feel better yourself if she was out of your sight for good and all. And if there's a man ready and willing, it would be a most outrageous deed for you to try and stop him."

"Never heard better sense," declared Joe. "That's turning the other cheek, that is; and if you find a female that's half as fine a Christian as Soosie—neuter or no neuter—you'll get more luck than you deserve."

John, however, was not minded to yield. He talked nonsense for half an hour, explained that he had been wickedly wronged and marvelled that they were so frosty and narrow as not to see it. He opened a spectacle of mental weakness, and when he was gone Joe took somewhat gloomy views of him.

"Us'll hope the poison will work out," said Susan. "But who could have thought it was there?"

"I look deeper," answered her father. "Yesternight I met Chaffe, and he whispered to me, under oaths of secrecy, which you'll do well to keep, Susan, that Ben Bamsey won't never be the same again. His body's building up, but Arthur, who's very understanding and quick, fears that Ben's brain have took a shock from this great illness and be weakened at the roots. It weren't, even in his palmy days, what you might call a first-class brain. He was a sweet-tempered, gentle creature with no great strength of mind, but so kindly and generous, that none troubled whether he had big intellects or no. As for Johnny, he was always excitable and a terror to a poacher and doubtful blade. And now it looks as if he was going to be a terror to himself—if nobody else."

"He'm so unforgiving," said Susan. "Surely, when a female tells a man she haven't got no use for him, that did ought to be a plain hint of her feelings."

"There be them whose memories are merciless," said Mr. Stockman. "God pity that sort, for they need it. If your memory's so built that it can't pass by a slight, or wrong, or misfortune, you have a hell of a life and waste a lot of brain

stuff and energy. There are such people; but they're as rare as madmen—in fact hate, or love, that won't die decent is a form of madness; and that's how it is with Johnny. That's one thing you'll always have to be thankful for, Soosie—one among many, I hope—that you was never tangled up with a man. 'Neuter' the rude youth called you; but even if you was, there can't be no sting to it seeing the shining angels of God be all neuters and our everlasting Creator's a neuter Himself."

These consolations, however, awoke no answering enthusiasm in Soosie-Toosie.

"I've heard Melindy say she didn't miss a family; but nature's nature," she answered, "and 'tis a great event to have bred an immortal creature, whether or no."

"When you say 'Melindy,' you lead my thoughts into another direction," declared the farmer. "To be plain, she's in my mind. She'll be a terrible lonely one for the future—unless—— In fact I'm turning it over."

This matter interested Soosie-Toosie more than most, for her own views were clear. She would have welcomed Mrs. Honeysett at Falcon Farm and believed that, from her personal point of view, such an advent must be to the good; but she felt by no means so sure whether it would result in happiness for her father.

"I could, of course, have her for the asking, if that was all that stood to it," mused Joe. "She'd come, and there's another here and there who'd come. Then I say to myself, 'What about you?'"

"Your good's mine and I'm very fond of Melindy. She'd suit me down to the ground, father. The question is whether the sudden

strain of another wife would interfere with your liberty."

"If I was a selfish sort of man, I might take the step—for my own convenience; but I put you first, Soosie, and I'm none too sure whether a character like Melinda might not cut the ground from under your feet."

"She wouldn't do that. I know my place. But, of course, it would be terrible sad to me if she was to cut the ground from under yours, father."

"She's wonderful," admitted Joe. "But, on the whole, she ain't wonderful enough to do that. My feet be a lot too sure planted for any woman to cut the ground from under 'em, Soosie. However, 'tis a bootless talk—feet or no feet. I'm only mentioning that she'd come if I whistled—just a pleasant subject to turn over, but no more."

CHAPTER XXVI

MR. PALK SEEKS ADVICE

AN OBSERVER OF LIFE has remarked that it is pleasanter to meet such men as owe us benefits than those to whom we owe them. When, therefore, Thomas Palk appeared one Saturday afternoon in the workshop of Arthur Chaffe at Lower Town, the carpenter, guessing he came for gratitude, was pleased to see him. It was a half holiday, but Mr. Chaffe ignored such human weaknesses. He held that the increased demand for shorter working hours was among the most evil signs of the times, failing to appreciate in this regard the difference between working for yourself and other people.

Thomas plunged into an expression of gratitude immediately while the carpenter proceeded with his business.

"We've got our rise, master, and Mr. Stockman named your name and said we had to thank you for the size of the lift—me and Maynard, that is. And hearing that, I felt it was duty to do it."

"And thank you also, Thomas. Few remember such things."

"He wouldn't have gone so far single-handed."

"The employer be always reluctant to see things are worth what they'll fetch, except when

he's selling his own stuff. But the Trades Unions be bent on showing them. The Guilds of the old days was powerfuller and better for some things. And they thought of the workmanship: Trades Unions only think of the worker. What I call workmanship, such as you see in this shop, be a thing of the past."

"There's some things have got to be done right and not scamped, however."

"True; the work on the land must be done right, or the face of the earth will show it. But the joy of the workmanship be gone out of work in the young men. Wages come between them and the work of their hands. Patience is the first step to fine work."

"Patience be too often mistook for contentment; and when the masters think you'm content they be only too pleased to leave it at that," said Mr. Palk.

"Yet impatience is the first uprooter of happiness," argued Mr. Chaffe. "Take a little thing like habits. Only yesterday a particular nice, clean old woman was grumbling to me because her husband's simple custom was to spit in the fire when he was smoking; and sometimes he'd miss the fire. A nasty vexation for her, no doubt; but not a thing as ought to cast a shadow over a home. Our habits are so much a part of ourselves, that it never strikes us we can worry our friends with 'em; but if you consider how the habits of even them you care about often fret you, then you'll see how often your little ways fret them."

"Like Ben Bamsey," said the horseman. "'Tis whispered he've grown tootlish since his famous illness. That'll call for patience at Green Hayes."

"Yes, the poor old man be sinking into the

cloud, and the only bright thought is that he won't know it, or suffer himself. The light's growing dim, and doctor says he'll fade gradual till he don't know one from another. And then, such is human nature, his family may change too, and forget what he was, and come slow and sure to think of him as a thing like the kettle, or washing day—just a part of life and not much more."

"Better he'd died."

"He'll be a reminder and a lesson and a test of character. His wife will see he don't come to be just a shadow, like a picture on the wall—so will I, so far as I can. He's been a very great friend of mine and always will be, wits or no wits."

Mr. Palk, impressed with these opinions, was inspired to ask a question that had long troubled him. He debated the point while a silence fell, save for the noise of Arthur's plane.

"Tell me this," he said suddenly. "By and large would you reckon that if a man sees a wrong thing being done—or what seems a wrong thing in his eyes—did he ought to seek to right it? It ain't his business in a manner of speaking; and yet, again, wrong be everybody's business; and yet, again, others might say it weren't a wrong at all and the man's judgment in fault to say it was wrong."

Arthur cast down his plane and pondered the proposition. But his quick mind, even while considering the case, found a subconscious way of also speculating as to what lay behind it. He knew everybody's affairs and was familiar with a rumour that Maynard secretly paid court to Dinah Waycott. For some reason he suspected that this might be in the mind of Maynard's fellow-worker.

"You put the question very well, Tom, but yet make it a bit difficult to answer," he said. "If you was to say you saw wrong being done and asked me if you ought to try and right it, then I should answer you that it was your bounden duty. But you ban't sure if it is wrong being done, so that's the point you've got to clear up; and until I know more of the facts of the case, I couldn't say more."

Thomas Palk considered this speech and did not immediately reply, while Arthur spoke again.

"Have you heard anybody else on the subject, or be it a thing only come to your own notice?"

"I don't feel no doubt myself; but I can't say as anybody else but me seems to see it."

"Mind—don't you answer if you don't want; but is there a woman in it, Thomas?"

Mr. Palk considered.

"If there was?"

"Then be terrible careful. You're not a jolter-head, as would rush in and make trouble along of hasty opinions; and if you think what's doing be wrong, then, in my judgment, you'd do well and wisely to speak. But keep the woman in your mind and do nought to hurt her."

Mr. Palk expired a deep breath of satisfaction at this counsel.

"So be it," he said. "I'll do it; and for the sake of a female it shall be done."

"Then you won't have it on your conscience, whether or no, Thomas."

"'Tis my conscience be doing of it," said Mr. Palk.

Nevertheless he felt a measure of doubt on this point. His motives were beyond his own power of analysis.

"I might come and let you know the upshot one day," he said.

"You'll be welcome," promised Mr. Chaffe; then Thomas went his way.

There now awaited him a very formidable deed; but he was determined not to shrink from it, while still unable to explain to himself the inspiration to anything so tremendous.

CHAPTER XXVII

DISCOVERY

CIRCUMSTANCES SWEEPED THOMAS to action sooner than he had intended and, though slow of wits, he was quickened to grasp an opportunity and essay his difficult and dangerous adventure. Even if he failed and received the reward that not seldom falls to well doing, he would be able to sustain it when he considered his motives.

There came an occasion on which Joe Stockman declared himself to be ill in the tubes; and as the fact interfered with certain of his own plans, it caused him much depression and irritation. Indeed he was greatly troubled at the passing weakness and took care that Falcon Farm should share his own inconvenience. He railed and was hard to please. He reminded Palk and Maynard of their rise and hoped they would not imitate the proletariat in general and ask for more and more, while doing less and less. He criticised and carped; and while the men suffered, his daughter endured even worse than they. It was possible for Lawrence and Thomas to escape to their work, and since Joe held the open air must not for the present be faced, they were safe for most of their time; but Soosie-Toosie found

herself not so happily situated and when, after dinner on a wet and stormy day in early May, her father decided that he must have a mustard and linseed poultice that night, a bottle of brown sherry and a certain lozenge efficacious for the bronchial tubes, despite the atrocious weather, she gladly consented to make the journey to Ashburton.

"'Tis too foul for you to go. Better let me," ventured Thomas, when the need arose; but Mr. Stockman negatived his proposal.

"The weather's mending as any fool can see," he said, "and if it comes on worse, you'd best to take a cab home, Susan. 'Twill be the doctor to-morrow if I ban't seen to; and Lord He knows how such as me can pay doctors."

"I'm wishful to go," answered his daughter. "You bide close by the fire and I'll be gone this instant moment."

"If the pony wasn't in sight of foaling, you could have took the cart," answered Joe; "but that's outside our powers to-day."

"It will do me good," she answered, and soon was gone, through lanes where the mad, spring wind raved and flung the rain slantwise and scattered fields and roads with young foliage torn off the trees.

Thomas Palk saw her go and his heart grew hard. He proceeded with his work for an hour, then the ferment within him waxed to boiling-point and he prepared to strike at last. He went indoors, changed his wet jacket and entered the kitchen, where Joe sat sighing and gurgling over the fire with a tumbler of hot whisky and water beside him.

"You!" he said. "God's light! Be you feared of the weather too?"

"You know if I'm feared of weather, master. But I be taking half an hour off. There's nought calling for me special and I'm going over some weak spots in the stable timber where we want fresh wood. The big plough hoss chews his crib and us must run a bit of sheet tin over it, I reckon; and there's dry rot too. But I want a word, and I'll be very much obliged to you if you'll bear with me for a few minutes."

"I bear with life in general, including you, Thomas; so speak and welcome," answered Mr. Stockman, "though I hope it's nothing calling for any great feats of mind on my part. When I get a cold in the tubes, it withers my brain like a dry walnut for the time being."

Thomas felt rather glad to hear this.

"No, no," he said. "I couldn't put no tax upon your brain—ain't got enough myself. 'Tis a small matter in one sense and yet in another a large matter. Lookers-on see most of the game, as they say; and though I ban't no nosey-poker, and far too busy a man, I hope, yet, there 'tis: I live here and I can't but see us did ought to have another female servant under this roof."

"And why for, Thomas, if you'll be so good as to explain?" asked Mr. Stockman.

"Now we be coming to it," answered the horseman. "And I beg you in Christian charity to take it as it is meant—respectful and as man to master. But there 'tis: the reason why for we want another woman here is that there be a lot too much for one woman to do. And that means, as I see it, that Miss Stockman's doing the work of two women. And such things be easily overlooked, especially in her case, because she's a towser for work and don't know herself that she's

got far too much upon her. She's just slipped into it, and 'tis only by looking at the affair from outside you see it is so; and through nobody's fault in particular but just by chance; yet she's doing more than a human creature ought; for her work's never ended. You say you done the work of ten in your palmy days, master, so perhaps it don't fret you to see her doing the work of three; but the female frame ban't built for more than a fair day's work, and in my humble opinion, as a friend of the family and proud so to be, Miss Susan's toiling a lot harder than be safe for her health; and I feel cruel sure as some day the strain will tell and she'll go to pieces. Not that she'd ever grumble. This very day she'll be properly drowned out afore she comes home; and I dare say will be too busy working at you when she comes back to put off her wet clothes, or think of herself. But there it is; I do believe she moils and toils beyond the limit, and I point it out and hope you'll take it as 'tis meant, from a faithful servant of the family. And if it was the other way round and I had a girl I was making work heavy and you called my attention to it, I'd be very thankful, master."

"Capital, Thomas," said Mr. Stockman. "Never heard your tongue flow so suent afore. You say all you feel called to say, then I'll answer you, if you'll allow me."

"That's all," answered Palk. "And, as man to man, I do pray you won't feel I've said a word beyond my duty."

Joe appeared quite unangered and indeed only mildly interested. He sipped at his glass; then lighted his pipe and drew at it for half a minute before he replied.

"Every man has a right to do and say what he feels to be his duty, Thomas. And women likewise. It's a free country in fact—or so we pretend—and I should be very sorry to think as you, or Maynard, or the boy even, was bound to endure my tyrant manners and customs a minute longer than your comfort could put up with 'em. But that cuts both ways, don't it? An all-seeing eye like yours will grant that?"

"I ain't got an all-seeing eye, master. And of course we could go if we was wishful to go. But a man's daughter be different. She can't go very well, can she?"

"She cannot," admitted Mr. Stockman. "And I've yet to hear she's fretting to do so. This place is her home, and she's stood at her father's right hand ever since he was doomed to widowhood. And I may be wrong, of course, but I've always laboured under the opinion she loved her parent and was proud and pleased to be the crown of his grey hairs. But in your case, Thomas, the position is a bit otherwise. You can go when you please, or when I please. 'Tis well within your power to seek other work, where your kind heart won't be torn watching a daughter do her duty by a sick father; and 'tis well within my power to wish you to go. And I do wish it. I'm wishing it something tremendous this moment."

Mr. Stockman smiled genially and continued.

"In a word, I'm going to get along without you now, and so we'll part Monday month, if you please. And delighted I shall be to give you a right down good character for honesty and sound understanding—where the hosses are concerned."

Mr. Palk had not expected this. He was much bewildered.

"D'you mean it, master?" he asked, with eyes not devoid of alarm.

"I do, my dear. I never meant anything with a better appetite. A great loss, because with one like me—old and stricken before my time, along of working far too hard, which was a foolish fault in my generation—it comforted me to feel I'd got a hossman in you worthy of the name. You be the pattern of a good, useful sort, that's dying out—worse luck. But a meddlesome man, that has time to spare from the hosses for the women, and thrusts in between parent and child, be very much against the grain with me. And though, of course, you may be quite right, and know better how to treat and cherish a grown-up daughter than a stupid creature like me—and you a bachelor—yet even the worm will turn, Thomas. And, worm though I am, I be going to venture to turn."

"I meant well, master."

"And don't you always mean well? Why, you're the most well-meaning man, after myself, I ever had the luck to meet, Thomas. So we'll part friends Monday month."

Joe spoke with far greater cordiality than when raising Mr. Palk's wages six weeks before. He beamed graciously on Thomas and lighted his pipe again.

"The talk be at an end now, because I mustn't strain my tubes," he said. "And I'll beg you not to return to the subject. Both me and my God are very well satisfied with the way I brought up Soosie-Toosie, and so's she. She's my master-jewel and always will be, though she'll never know all I've done for her, because no child ever can know the heights of a good father's love."

"Monday month then, master?"

"If quite convenient to yourself."

Then Palk went out into storm and gathering dusk. The woods of Buckland waved grey through the gloaming and rain swept them heavily. The wind shouted over the granite crown of the Beacon; sheep and cattle had crept down from the high land and stood in the shelter of walls and woods.

Thomas considered with himself. He was in a state as perturbed as it was possible for such a stolid spirit to be; but he remembered that the innocent cause of this revolution was now returning heavy laden up the long hill from the market town.

He decided that he would go and meet Susan. His upheaval took the form of increased solicitude for Miss Stockman.

"She shall hear the fatal news from me—not him," he reflected.

He set off and presently sighted the woman tramping up the hill in the rain. Under the wild weather and fading light, she looked like some large, bedraggled moth blown roughly about. Her basket was full and her left arm held a parcel in blue paper. It was the only spot of colour she offered. They met, greatly to her surprise.

"Good Lord!" she said. "Have father put more chores on you? Be you going to Ashburton?"

"I am not," he answered. "I came out with my big umbrella to meet you."

She was fluttered.

"How terrible kind! But 'tis no odds. I be bone-wet."

Nevertheless, Mr. Palk unfurled a large, faded, glass-green umbrella over her.

"Give me the basket," he said, "and I'll walk betwixt you and the weather. I come for more reasons than one, Susan. Something's happened while you were to town and I'd sooner you heard it from me than him."

"Nought gone wrong with father?"

"That's for others to say. But something have gone parlous wrong with me."

She started and hugged her blue paper parcel closer. It contained the bottle of brown sherry.

"I hope not, I'm sure."

"In a word, I'm sorry to say I leave Falcon Farm Monday month. It have fallen with a terrible rush upon me—and my own fault too. I can't tell you the reason, but so it is. The master's sacked me."

Miss Stockman stood still and panted. Her face was wet with rain; her hair touzled; her hat dripping.

"Be you saying truth?" she asked, and fetched a handkerchief from her pocket and dried her face.

"Gospel. I done a thing as he took in a very unkind spirit, I'm sorry to say."

The blue parcel trembled.

"Going—you? Never!"

"Monday month it have got to be."

"Why for? What have you gone and done? He thought the world of you, behind your back."

"To my face, however, he did not—not this evening. It was a very dangerous task, as I reckoned when I started on it; but I felt drove—Lord knows why! I meant well, but that don't amount to much when you fail."

"This be a cruel come-along-of-it," she said blankly. "I couldn't have heard nothing to trouble me more, Thomas. You was the bestest we've ever had to Falcon Farm—and kindness alive."

"Thank you I'm sure. We've been very good friends. And why not?"

"I can't picture you gone. 'Twas a fit of temper. I'll speak to father."

"Don't you do that. There weren't no temper, nor yet language. He meant it and he's an unchanging man."

"Whatever did he say? What did you do? I will know! It shan't be hid. Perhaps 'tis only his tubes fretting him."

"No—nothing to do with his tubes. He was well within his rights."

"Why can't you tell me what it is, then? If you want to stop—but perhaps you don't?"

He considered.

"I never thought to go, and I never wanted to go less than what I do at this minute, seeing you cast down. I be very much obliged to you in a manner of speaking for not wanting me to go."

She looked up drearily at him and sniffed.

"We never know our luck," she said. "Not you, but me."

To his intense amazement he perceived that Susan was shedding tears. She shook her head impatiently and it was not rain that fell from her face. If a small fire can kindle a great one, so surely may a drop of water swell into a river.

Light began to dawn in the mind of the man and it much astonished him by what it revealed there. He was, in fact, so astounded by the spectacle that he fell into silence and stared with mental eyes at the explanation of the mysteries

that had long puzzled him. His next remark linked past with present.

"Be damned if I don't begin to know now why for I done this!" he said with a startled voice. "I've wondered for weeks and weeks what was driving me on, and I couldn't put no name to it, Susan; but 'tis coming out in me. Shut your mouth a minute and let me think."

She kept silence and they plodded on. At the top of the hill a gust caught the umbrella and it was in peril. Thomas turned it against the wind.

"Come under the lew side of the hedge," he said. "I thought 'twas conscience driving at me—but I begin to see it weren't. Fetch in here under the trees a minute."

She followed him through a gap at the summit of the hill and they left the road for the partial shelter of spruce firs. They escaped the wind, but the rain beat from the branches upon Mr. Palk's umbrella.

"You're a woman of very high qualities and a good bit undervalued in your home—so it seems to me. You're the light of the house, but 'twas left for others to find that out, seemingly—not your father. He's a man with a soft tongue, but a darned hard heart—to say it respectful."

"I'm nought and less than nought. But I was always pleased to pleasure you," she answered.

"The light of the house," he repeated. "And 'tis the light be far more to the purpose than the candlestick. I can speak to you straight, Susan, because I'm ugly as sin myself and not ashamed of it. I didn't have the choosing of my face, and my Maker didn't ax me what I'd like to look like come I grew up. And same with you. But you be a living lesson to us other plain people."

Susan was not concerned with his philosophy: she had fastened on a question of fact.

"You're not particular ugly, Thomas. I've seen scores plainer. You've got a very honest face and nice grey eyes, if I may say so."

"Certainly you may say so, and I'm well content as you've been to the trouble to mark the colour of my eyes. 'Tis a way women have. They always know the colour of their friends' eyes. And if my face be honest in your opinion, that's good news also. And as for your eyes, if they was in a prettier setting, they'd well become it."

Susan grew a dusky red, but kept to the point.

"If you can say such things as that, surely you can tell me why you're going?"

"I meddled—I—but 'tis all dust and ashes afore what's stirring in my head now. You'd like me to bide at Falcon Farm, seemingly?"

"I should then. You've got nice ways, and—and you've always been amazing pitiful to me."

"Where would your father be if you left him?"

"I'll never leave him. He knows that."

"How old might you be?"

"Thirty-five—thirty-six come October."

"Some say port-wine marks are handed down, and again some say they are not. And if you was to hand it down, you'd hand down what's better too, I shouldn't wonder."

She did not answer, but gasped and stared in front of her.

"Look here," he said. "Now I see so plain why for I done this, why the mischief shouldn't you? 'Twas done because I've risen up into loving you, Susan! I want you—I want to marry you—I'll take my dying oath I do. It have just come over me like a flap of lightning. Oh, hell!"

The bottle of wine had trembled dangerously in Soosie-Toosie's arm before; now it dropped, broke on a stone, and spread its contents at their feet. The sweet air suddenly reeked of it. But Susan ignored the catastrophe.

"Me! Me! My God, you must be mad!"

"If so, then there's a lot to be said for being mad. But I ain't. I see the light. I've been after you a deuce of a time and never grasped hold of it. I didn't think to marry. In fact my mother was the only woman I ever cared a cuss about till I seed you. And no doubt, for your part, you've long despaired of the males; but you'm a born wife, Susan; and you might find me a very useful pattern of husband. I love you something tremenjous."

"'Tis beyond dreaming," she said regarding him with wild eyes. "'Tis beyond belief, Thomas."

"It may be," he admitted, "but not beyond truth. We can make it a cast-iron fact; and 'tis no odds who believes it, so long as it happens."

"You be above yourself for the minute. Your face is all alight. Best to think it over and go to church and let a Sunday pass. I can't believe you really and truly mean it."

"God's truth I do, then."

"Father—did I ought to put love of you afore love of him, Thomas?"

"Certainly you did ought, and you've got the Bible behind you. If you love me, then you did ought to put me afore every damn thing, and cleave to me for ever after. Say you'll do it, then! I want to hear you say it, Susan. 'Twill cheer me up a lot, because I've never had the sack afore in my life and don't like the taste of it.

I be feeling low, and 'twill be a great thing to get back on farmer afore I go to bed to-night."

She was suspicious at once.

"You ban't doing this out of revenge, however?" she asked.

"For nought but love—that I'll swear."

"To be loved by a fine man—a go-by-the-ground creature like me!"

"And never no female better worthy."

"I'll take you, Thomas; but if you change your mind after you've slept on it, I shan't think no worse of you. Only this I'll say, I do love you, and I have loved you a longful time, but paid no attention to it."

"Then praise the Lord for all His blessings, I'm sure."

He held her close in his arms and they kissed each other. She clung to him fervently.

"Now, if you'll take the basket, I'll go back and buy another bottle of sherry wine," she said.

"Not at all. But we mustn't shatter the man at one blow. He'll want more than liquor when he hears about this. I'll traapse down for another bottle, and you go home under my umbrella; and change every stitch on you, and drink something hot, else you might fall ill."

"Ah! That's love! That's love!" she said, looking up at him wet-eyed.

"I'll show 'e what love be so soon as I know myself. You get home, and say as you dropped your bottle and was just going back for another when I met you, on my way to Ashburton, and offered to get it. And on the whole us'll keep the fearful news for a few days till he's well again. 'Twill be more merciful."

"You'm made of wisdom, Tom. 'Tis a great

relief to keep it from father a bit till I've got used to the thought."

"Kiss me again, then," he answered, and put his arms round her once more.

"There's a brave lot of 'e to cuddle whether or no."

"'Tis all yours I'm sure, if you really want it, dear Thomas."

"I be coming to want it so fast as I can, woman!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE LAW

FOR DINAH WAYCOTT the sole difficulty of her position began to clear itself; and since she was now convinced that she and Lawrence saw the future with the same vision, she felt that future approach quickly. It seemed, however, that, for her, joy could only be reached through sorrow, and on an occasion of meeting Maynard upon the Moor she said so.

"Nothing ever do run quite smooth, and out of my misfortune my fortune comes. For it's only a terrible sad thing that be clearing the road for us and leaving nobody in my life to think of but you."

She had assumed somewhat more than her lover at this point, and, in a sense, taken the lead.

"Your foster-father?" he said.

"Yes; it's a pretty dark cloud against my happiness, and if it was only for that, I'd be glad to be gone. You can't say yet he don't know me; but you can say he very soon won't. We seem to slip away from him according as he cared for us. He don't know Jane no more at all, and asks her what he can do for her when she comes in the room. But he knows Johnny off and on, and he knows me off and on too. His wife he still knows,

and I can see it's life and death to her that he shall go on knowing her; because it will be a great triumph for her if, when he's forgot everybody, he still remembers her."

"I dare say it would be."

"I'd have been jealous as fire that he shouldn't forget me, if it hadn't been for you. But not now. I won't be sorry to leave him now, and just love to remember what he was to me. It's cruel sad, poor old dear."

"There's a bright side, however," he answered. "And though you might say no man could be worse off than to lose his wits, yet for poor old Ben there's one good thing: he'll never know you've gone, or how you've gone."

"I've thought of that; but how can you be sure, if he'd had the mind left to understand, he wouldn't have been glad for me?"

"You know different, Dinah. He liked me; but he'd never have been glad, given the facts."

She was silent, and Lawrence spoke again.

"But you'll have the grateful memory of him."

"Yes; and if ever we get a son, Lawrence, he must be called Benjamin—I will have it so."

He fell silent. Dinah often spoke with delight of children; and it was at those times the man felt the drag on his heart hardest. They had argued much, but her frank puzzlement and even amusement at his problems and doubts began to wear them down. She knew it, but, behind her assumption of certainty, still suspected him a little.

It was agreed that they must now hide their friendship and their purpose for the sake of other people. Dinah grew full of plans, and Lawrence listened while she ran on; but she knew that the real plans would be made by him. A sort of

vagueness came into their relation and its cause was in his head, not his heart. That, too, she knew. But certain things to-day he told her, and certain things, unknown to him, she now determined to do.

"I've got the facts," he said, "and I'd like for you to hear them. And, after to-night, we mustn't see each other so often. To make it easier for us when we go, we'd better keep as far apart as need be till then. There's a lot must pass between us and we can't post letters very well—not in the pillar-boxes; but we may want a pillar-box of our own presently."

"What I hate about life," she cried, "is that you've got to pretend such a lot. If this had happened to Jane, she'd love the hiding up and the plotting and turning and twisting, like a hare running away from the hounds. But I hate it. I hate to think the world's full of people who look at life in such a way that what we're going to do must be wrong."

"They've been brought up with fixed ideas about marriage and think it's got more to do with God than with men and women. The interests of the Church are put high above right and justice for the people. They always were; and them that claim marriage is God's plan also claim that He would chain wretched, mistaken creatures together for life, quite regardless of their honour and decency and self-respect. It's funny that educated men should write the stuff I read; but the moment you see the word 'God' in a newspaper you can say good-bye to reason and pity. We're punished—we who make a mistake—for what? Oft for nothing but misreading character, or because truth's withheld from us on purpose.

Palk was telling of a man he knew who went courting and was never told his intended's mother was in a mad-house. And he married, and his wife went out of her mind with her first child. Now she's got to be put away and may live for fifty years, and sane, well-meaning people tell the man he must bide a widower for evermore—at the will of God! God wills he should go alone to his dying day, because his wife's people hid the truth from him."

"But the law—surely the law——?"

"The law's with the Church so far. They hunt in couples. But the law's like to be altered, 'tis thought; though no doubt the Church will call down fire from Heaven if any human mercy and common sense and decency is brought to bear on marriage."

"Can't the religious people see that lots quite as good as them, and quite as willing and wishful to do right, are being put in the wrong? And can't they see tortured men and women won't be patient for ever?"

"No; they put us in the wrong and they keep us in the wrong, for God's sake—so He shan't be vexed. They don't understand it isn't only adultery that breaks up marriage, but a thousand other things beside. It's human progress and education and understanding; and these pious people only leave one door to escape through. And they don't seem to see that to decent-thinking and self-respecting men and women that's a door they won't enter. They say, 'If you want to right your mistake, you must sin.' But if Almighty God made marriage, He never made such filth to be thrust down the throats of them that fail in marriage. Thus, any way, it stands with Minnie

Courtier at present—and with me. This is the law and clear enough. A man disappears and blots himself out of life, you may say, and, what's more important, blots himself out of the lives of everybody who knew him, including his wife. And the question is, what can the wife do about it? I've looked into this very close, and I find the issue is like a lot of other things in the law. It often depends on the judge, and how he reads the facts of the case, and whether he's all for the letter of the law, or one of the larger-minded sort, who give the spirit a chance. A man not heard about for seven years may be counted dead in the eyes of the law; but there's no presumption he died at any particular time in the seven years, and it isn't enough to say, 'Seven years are past and I'm in the right to presume somebody dead.' You must have legal permission, and judges differ. You've got to prove that diligent inquiries were made to find the vanished person before you apply to the Court, and a human sort of judge is satisfied as a rule and sets a man or woman free. But if circumstances show that the vanished party wouldn't be heard of, even if he was alive, then many frost-bound judges won't allow he's dead, or grant freedom to a deserted partner even after seven years. So, now, though the seven years are up, even if application was made to assume my death, it rests entirely on the character of the judge whether Mrs. Courtier would be allowed to do so."

"She may not care a button about it one way or the other," said Dinah—"any more than I do."

"Very likely. It's only of late that I've spared a thought to her. There's very little doubt in my

mind that she's settled down to being a widow—had enough of men, I reckon."

"You don't know, however?"

"I don't know—and it's time I did, I suppose. But how?"

Dinah considered.

"'Tis a great thought—that woman. I'd give a lot to know a bit about her," said Dinah.

"Suppose, for example——"

Then she broke off, for her mind had suddenly opened a path which must be followed alone, if followed at all. A possibility had occurred to Dinah—a possibility of vague and shadowy outline, but still not quite devoid of substance. She wondered intensely about a certain thing, and since, when she wondered, her spirit never rested until some answer to her wonderment was forthcoming, she felt now that this problem must be approached. There was hope in it for them both. She acknowledged to herself that the hope must be small; but it existed.

She changed the subject, but Maynard, following his own thoughts, which led in a different direction, did not observe that after a silence Dinah resumed about something else. He had also left the facts and drifted to the future. The suggestion that he himself had raised: to attempt some inquiry concerning his wife, though obvious enough to any third person, did not impress itself upon him as important. He mentioned it and dismissed it. He felt sufficiently certain of her and her present state. The details of his own future presented more pressing problems. For he was now affirmed to go—either with Dinah, or before her, on an understanding that she would follow.

Upon these thoughts she struck, so naturally that it seemed they were unconsciously communicating in their minds.

"We must set up a post office, Lawrence, where the letters won't need stamps; and for the minute I'd be glad if you could give me a few shillings for pocket-money. I've got a hatred now of Bamsey money and the five shillings a week Mrs. Bamsey gives me, because foster-father's past doing it himself. And I've told them that I'm not going to take any of his money in the future."

"I'm glad you have. But they won't agree."

Maynard brought out a little leathern purse and gave Dinah the contents—some thirty shillings.

She thanked him and assured him that would be enough. They parted soon afterwards and arranged to meet once more, on a date a fortnight hence, in late evening, at a certain gate not above a mile from Green Hayes.

"I may have something to tell you by then," she said, "and I'll find a post office. It'll be a year till I see you again."

He took a lingering leave of her and was moved by a last word she spoke at parting.

"We never get no time to love each other," she said, "'tis all hard, hateful talk and plotting. But we'll make up to each other some day."

Then he went his way, leaving her to develop her secret determination.

Conscience smote Dinah that she should enter upon any such adventure without telling him; but the fear that he might forbid her was too great, for she felt very positive the step she designed must be to the good. Certain precious and

definite knowledge at least would follow; and the worst that could happen would only leave them where they were.

She meant to go to Barnstaple. When she had broken off her speech, she was about to put it to Maynard whether the woman there might not be in his own position—desirous to marry and perhaps even already seeking the aid of the law to free herself from a vanished spouse. It seemed intensely possible to Dinah; but evidently in the mind of Lawrence no such likelihood existed. That he should not have followed the thought showed how little importance he attached to it—so little that she felt sure he would not have supported her sudden desire to learn more. Therefore she kept the inspiration from him and determined he should know nothing until her quest was accomplished.

And he, having left her, now endeavoured, as he had endeavoured for many days, to shake his mind clear of cobwebs and traditions and prevenient fears. Even his thoughts for her seemed petty when he was with her. Deeply he longed for Dinah, and the peace that she must bring to his mind, and the contentment inevitable out of a life shared with hers.

Perhaps for the first time he now resolutely banished every doubt, thrust them behind him, and devoted all future thought to their departure from England. He inclined to Australia now from all that he had read and heard about it. There he would take Dinah, and there, as 'Lawrence Maynard,' he would marry her.

He began to look back upon his doubts as unmanly and mawkish; he began to marvel that,

for so many painful months, he had entertained them. He assured himself that the air was clean and cloudless at last, and designed to advance the situation by definite preliminary steps before he met Dinah again.

CHAPTER XXIX

JOE TAKES IT ILL

MELINDA HONEYSETT came to see Mr. Stockman, and it happened that she paid her visit but half an hour after heavy tidings had fallen on his ears.

He was in his garden, sitting alone under a little arbour constructed at the side of the house with its eye in the sun; and there he sat with his hands in his pockets, idle, staring before him. He looked old and dejected too, nor did he rise to greet her when she entered the garden.

She approached him, therefore, and he gazed indifferently and dull-eyed upon her.

"Morning, Joe. They cabbages you gave me be all bolting¹ I'm sorry to say, and Mr. Ford, my next door neighbour, tells me I can't do nothing."

"Ban't the only things that's bolting."

"You'm down, seemingly?"

"Down and out you might say without straining the truth. It's a blasted world, though the sun do be happening to shine. I've had the hardest blow of my life this morning."

"Terrible sorry I'm sure. Good and bad luck don't wait for the weather. I be in trouble, too—

¹ *Bolting*—running to seed.

more or less. Jerry and Jane Bamsey have fallen out and I don't know what Jerry will do if it don't come right."

Mr. Stockman seemed totally uninterested at this news. He still looked before him and brooded. Melinda took a cane chair, which stood near his, and mopped her face, for she was hot.

"Only a lovers' quarrel I dare say; but if it was broke off altogether I reckon my brother might live to be thankful. And Orphan Dinah's gone to find work somewhere. I hope she will this time. Jane thinks she's run away to get married."

"Marriage—marriage!" he said. "Perdition take all this bleating about marriage! I'm sick to death of it, as well I may be."

She was astonished.

"I never heard you talk against it for them so inclined. Marriage is a good bit in the air this summer, I believe. My sailor brother, Robert, be coming home for a spell pretty soon. And he writes me as he'll wed afore he goes back to sea, if he can find one. And Mr. Ford, the gardener, next to me—I reckon he means to marry again. He's got a great opinion of the state. Harry Ford's my own age to a day, strange to say. Our birthdays fall together. He had no luck with his wife, but he's going to try once more."

"I don't want to hear no more about him, or anybody else," said Mr. Stockman. "'Tis doubtful manners mentioning him to me. If you knew what I know, you'd be dumb with horror."

"Well, I can't be horrified till I hear. Where's Soosie-Toosie?"

She received a shattering answer.

"To hell with Soosie-Toosie!" cried Joe.

"Man alive, what's got into you? Be you ill again, or is it Palk leaving? If that's the trouble, lift your finger and he'll stay. He's a clumsy, ignorant creature; but you're always quick to forgive faults a man can't help. Pardon the chap and let him bide. I've always told you it was going too far to sack him on that. Don't be craking about it no more. It's your fault, after all, that he's going."

He glowered at her.

"You're like cats—the pack of you—never do what a reasonable creature wants, or expects. Put a bowl for 'em and they'll only drink out of a jug. Call 'em to the fire, they'll go to the window. Ope the window for 'em and they'll turn round and make you ope the door. And only a born fool wastes thought to please a cat; and be damned if ever I will again."

"Be you talking about Susan, or me?" asked Mrs. Honeysett, with rising colour. Then, as she rose to leave him, he broke his news.

"Not an hour ago, when all was peace and I was turning over an advertisement for a new horseman, they crept before me, hand in hand—like a brace of children."

"Who did?"

"Why, Susan and that blasted serpent, Palk."

"Palk a serpent!"

"Do, for God's sake, shut up and listen, and don't keep interrupting. They came afore me. And Palk said that he hoped we was going to part friends and not enemies, though he was afraid as he might have to give me another jolt. Then I told him to drop my darter's hand that instant moment and not come mountybanking about

when he ought to be at work; and then he said that Susan had taken him, and they hoped afore long to be married!"

"Mercy on us, Joe!"

"That's what I heard this morning. And the woman put in her oar when I asked Palk if he was drunk. She said she loved him dearly, and hoped that I wouldn't fling no cold water over her great joy. Got it all by heart of course."

"What a world! That's the last thing ever I should have thought to fall out."

"Done, of course, for revenge, because I cast the man away—cunning devil!"

"Don't you say that. You must take a higher line, Joe. Soosie-Toosie's a good woman, and you always said Thomas was a good man."

"He's not a good man. He's a beast of a man. He's got one of them hateful, cast-iron memories, and when I began to talk he opened his mouth and withstood me and flung my own words in my face."

"What words?"

"I'd told him, when he dared to come afore me about my way with my only child, that if there was anything in the world I could do for Susan to make her home a happier place, he might rest assured she would tell me so herself. And the serpent remembered that and then invited the woman to speak; which she did do, and swore that her life, without this grey-headed son of a gun, wouldn't be worth living no more; and she hoped that I wouldn't pay back all her love and life-long service by making a rumpus about it. And I've got to go down the wind like a dead leaf afore them, because I soon saw that under her mild words Susan weren't going to be shook."

"She wouldn't be. There's no strength like the strength of a woman who gets her only chance."

"I told 'em to get out of my sight for a pair of cold-blooded, foxy devils, and so they have; and soon, no doubt, they'll be gone for good and all. And that's the middle and both ends of it; and the worst and wickedest day's work ever I heard tell about."

"You've dropped below your usual high standards, if I may say so," answered Melinda. "Little blame to you that you should feel vexed, I'm sure; but 'tis more the shock than the reality, I believe. For, when you come to turn it over, Joe, you can't help seeing there's rhyme and reason in it."

"You say that! A woman to fly from the safety and security of her father's home to a man who don't even know what work he's going to do when he leaves me. And a wretch that's proved as deep as the sea. Can't you read his game? He knows that Susan be my only one, and bound to have all some day—or he thinks he knows it."

"Don't you say that. Keep a fair balance. Remember you held a very high opinion of Palk not two months ago, when he showed by his acts to his dead sister's child that he was a high-minded man."

"I'll thank you to keep my side of this, please," he answered. "I don't much like the line you're taking, Melinda. Just ax yourself this: would any man, young or old, look at Susan as a possible help-mate and think to marry her, if he warn't counting on the jam that would go with the powder? She's my child, and I'm not one to bemoan my fortune as to that, but a woman's a woman, and

was the male ever born who could look at Susan as a woman? You know very well there never was."

"You couldn't; but men ain't all so nice as you about looks. And you can't deny that, apart from being a bit homely, Susan——"

"Stop!" he said. "I believe you knew about this all the time and be here as a messenger of peace!"

"Don't think nothing of the sort, there's a good man. I'd so soon have expected the sun to go backward as hear any such thing. But 'tis done. It's got to be, seemingly. So start from there and see how life looks."

Melinda indeed was also thinking how life looked. Her mind ran on, and she had already reached a point to which Mr. Stockman's bruised spirit was yet to bring him. She prepared to go away.

"I won't stop no more now. You'll have a lot to think over in your mind about the future. Thank goodness you be well again—and never looked better, I'm sure. What's their plans?"

"Damn their plans—how about my plans?"

"You'll come to your plans gradual. And don't think 'tis the end of the world. You never know. When things turn inside out like this, we be often surprised to find there's a lot to be said for changes after all."

"'Tis mortal easy to be wise about other folk's troubles," he said.

Then Mrs. Honeysett departed, and felt Joe's moody eyes upon her back as she went slowly and thoughtfully away. Soosie-Toosie's eyes were also upon her; but that she did not know.

CHAPTER XXX

THE NEST

JOE STOCKMAN, like a stricken animal, hid himself from his fellow-men at this season; yet it was not curious that he should conceal his tribulation, because he knew that sympathy must be denied. To run about among the people, grumbling because his daughter had found a husband, was a course that Joe's humour told him would win no commiseration. But he made it evident to those chiefly involved that he little liked the match; he declined to see any redeeming features and went so far as to say that the countryside would be shocked with Susan for leaving her father under such circumstances.

She did not speak of it; neither did Thomas, but the latter grumbled to Maynard when they were alone, and at the same time heard something from Lawrence that interested him.

They were hoeing the turnips together and the elder spoke.

"There's no common decency about the man in my opinion," he said. "Goodjer take him! He's like a sulky boy and pretends that facts ban't facts, while every day of the week shows they are. You know how he goes on—chittering at me and Susan, but never to us—just letting

out as if he was talking to the fire, or the warming-pan on the wall—of course for us to hear.”

“He didn’t know his luck; and when you suddenly see your luck for the first time just afore it’s going to be taken away from you it makes you a bit wild,” explained Lawrence.

“Let him be wild with himself then, and cuss himself—not us. And you always see his lips saying ‘sarpent’ to himself every time you catch his eye. It’s properly ondacent, because there’s duties staring the man in the face and he’s trying his damndest to wriggle out of ’em!”

“What duties?”

“Why, his daughter’s wedding, I should think! Not that I care a cuss, and should be the better pleased if he wasn’t there letting all men see he hated the job; but Susan be made of womanly feeling, and she reckons he did ought to come to the church and give her away, all nice and suent, same as other parents do. And why the hell not?”

“You must allow for the shock, Tom. He’d got to rely on you and your future wife like his right and left hand; and to have the pair of you snatched away together——”

“You be always his side.”

“Not in this matter, anyway. I know very well what you feel like, and nobody wishes you joy better than me. You’ve got a grand wife. But he knows what he’s losing, and you can’t expect him to be pleased. There’s another thing hanging over master. It won’t seem much compared with you going. But I’m off before very long myself.”

“By gor! You going too!”

“In the fall, I reckon.”

"If it's all the same to you, I'd be glad if you didn't break this to Stockman till our job's a thought forwarder," said Thomas. "He can only stand a certain amount. This will very like turn him against human nature in general, and if he gets desperate, he may disgrace himself."

"I shan't speak just yet."

"We was reckoning—Soosie and me—that he'd go bald-headed for Melinda Honeysett before this—if only to hit back. Because, if he done that, he might cut my future wife out of his will, you see. And, in his present spirit of mind, I believe it would comfort him a lot to do so—and tell me he had."

"No, no—he wouldn't lower himself like that. And as for Mrs. Honeysett, I reckon he's to work in that quarter. He can't strike all of a sudden, of course, because the people would say he'd only done it for his own convenience; but he'll be about her before long, I expect."

"He named her name at Green Hayes to my certain knowledge," said Thomas, "and Mrs. Bamsey heard him do so; and she told Arthur Chaffe, the carpenter; and he told me. And he said more. He said that he had marked that Joe had lost a lot of his old bounce and weren't by no means so charming as he used to be."

"There's no doubt this job has upset him a lot."

"He did ought to remember he can't go sailing on and have everything his own way all his life, no more than anybody else."

They hoed together shoulder to shoulder, then reached the end of their rows and turned again.

"And what's in your mind?" asked Thomas presently, as he stood up to rest his back.

"I much want to get abroad. It's always been a wish with me to see a foreign country."

"A very fine idea. I'd so soon do the same as not; but I heard a chap say that you find the land pretty near all under machinery if you go foreign. And I shouldn't quit hosses at my time of life."

"There's your wife to think on. She'd never like to put the sea between her and her father."

"As to that," answered Palk, "the woman's only a human woman and she haven't deserved this conduct. Why, God's light! if she'd stole his money-box and set the house on fire he couldn't take it no worse!"

These things were heard by another pair of ears in the evening of that day, for then Maynard saw Dinah again. But much passed between the lovers before they reached the subject of Susan and Thomas. Maynard had been deeply interested to hear of Dinah's sudden departure, of which she had told him nothing, and he had puzzled ever since learning the fact mentioned by Melinda Honeysett. For he did not guess her purpose, or her destination, and the fact that she had gone away only served to explain her need for money. She let him know, however, before they met, and that without any word; for during her absence, there came a picture postcard to Lawrence—a coloured picture of Barnstaple parish church; and that told him everything.

He trusted her, but knew her forthright ways and felt very anxious to see her again. The date and place for their next meeting had been fixed between them at their last conversation, and as

he had heard that Dinah was returned, he knew that she would keep the appointment. He brooded for hours upon her action and inclined to a shadow of regret that she should have taken it, yet the fact did not astonish him, looking back at their last meeting; for had Dinah asked permission to go he would not have suffered it in his mood at the time. That she knew; and yet she had gone. He recognised the immense significance of her action, and the time seemed interminable until the dusk of that day, when he was free. Their meeting-place was a gate in a lane one mile from Green Hayes among the woods ascending to Buckland. There it had been planned they should join each other for the last time before one, or both, disappeared from the Vale.

Maynard felt a sense of smallness as he went to the tryst. He seemed to be going to meet somebody stronger, more resolute, more steadfast of spirit than himself. Surely Dinah had done the things that would have better become him to do. And yet he could not blame himself there, for it would have been impossible for him to set foot in the town where, no doubt, his wife still lived. He had wearied himself with futile questions, impossible to answer until Dinah should meet him, and there was nothing left but intense love and worship for her in Maynard's mind when they did meet. He had banished the last doubt during her absence, and now told himself that not moral sensibility but moral cowardice had ever caused him to doubt. He had probed the equivocal thing in him and believed that its causes were deep down in some worthless instinct, independent of reason. She should at least find

him as clear and determined as herself at last. The details of their actions were also defined. He had planned a course that would, he hoped, suit Dinah well enough, though as yet he knew not whether any word of hers might modify it.

She was waiting for him and came into his arms with joy. She guessed that her postcard had revealed her adventure and began by begging for forgiveness. This he granted, but bade her talk first.

"It's made me long to go out in the world," she said. "Just this taste. I've never seemed to understand there was anything beyond Ashburton and Lower Town; but now I've gone afield and seen miles and miles of England, and I've met people that never heard of the Vale. Say you ban't cross again, my dear heart. You know very well why I went. It rose up on me like a flame of fire—to make sure. I told 'em at Green Hayes I had some business up the country, and they think I went to be married—Jane's idea that was. She's positive sure I'm married, though I've told her in plain words I'm not."

"Never mind them. It was a needful point, and you grasped it quicker than I did. But I couldn't have gone myself."

"It was my work and I've done it; and I wish more had come of it. But nothing has. I took a room in a little inn near the station and tramped about and found her shop in the best part of the town. A big place with fine windows—a dairy and creamery and refreshment room. Just 'Courtier' over the windows, in big, gold letters, and a few maidens inside and—tea. I marked her, of course, the minute I saw her. She's in the shop herself—rather grand, but not above

lending a hand when they're busy. She's up in the world. They knew about her at the inn where I stopped, and told me the story. They said her husband went mad on the honeymoon and disappeared off the earth. I went to the shop three times and had my tea there, and the second time there was a man at the counter talking to her. But he didn't look much of it. So there it is. She's going on with her life just as you thought, and making money; and what the people see, I saw, and what they don't see, or know, is no matter.

"She's worn well, I should think. She's a pretty woman; but she's hard and her voice is hard. She wouldn't have no mercy on people under her. At my inn she was spoke very well of and thought a bit of a wonder. You was forgot. They said it was thought you killed yourself. And now that the seven years are up, some fancied she might marry again, but others didn't think she ever would, being too independent. A man or two they mentioned; but the opinion I heard most was that she never wanted to change. I couldn't ax too much about her, of course."

So Dinah told her tale.

"I wish it had been different," she went on. "I hoped all sorts of things—that I'd find her married again, or gone, or perhaps dead. But there she is, so large as life, and I shouldn't think she'd ever marry for love, but she might for money, or for getting a bit more power. I didn't feel to hate her in the least, or anything like that. I felt sorry for her in a way, knowing what she'd missed, and I thought, if it had been different, what a big man you might be by now. But you'll be bigger some day along with me."

He asked various questions, which she answered, and he observed how absolutely indifferent Dinah found herself before the facts. She evidently recognised no relationship whatever between the husband and wife. From the adventures at Barnstaple she returned to the present, and he let her talk on, waiting to speak himself till she had finished.

She had been away nine days and returned to find Jane fallen out with Jerry Withycombe. Mr. Bamsey had recognised her on her return and called her by name and made her sit beside him for a long time. But the next morning he had forgotten her again. Faith Bamsey had also thought Dinah must have disappeared to be married, but believed her when she vowed it was not so. John Bamsey was away for the time, doing bailiff's work up the river above Dartmeet.

Then he told her of his determination and greatly rejoiced her, save in one particular.

"We don't go together," he said, "and the details will very soon clear themselves; but there must be no shadow on your memory, here or anywhere, when you're gone. I give Joe notice presently and go to Australia, to get the home ready. You find work and, for a bit, keep that work. Then you leave it for London, or a big town, where ships sail from, and your passage is took and you come along. That leaves them guessing here, and none can ever say a word against you. But so sure as we go together, then Stockman tells everybody that I'm a married man, and the harm's done."

"You do puzzle me!" she answered. "You can't get this bee out of your bonnet, Lawrence—such a clever chap as you, too. What in fortune's

name does it matter what Cousin Joe says about you, or what the people believe about me? I know you're not married, and when I wed you I shall be your one and lawful wife. Who else is there—now foster-father be gone? He's past hurting, poor old dear. And I'm going when you go, and half the joy of my life would be lost if I didn't sail along with you in the ship. That I do bargain for. Oh, I wish it was to-morrow we were running away!"

"I hate to run."

"I love it—yes, I do, now. I wish to God I wasn't going to lose sight of you again. But it won't be for long."

They spoke of the details and he pointed out that her plan must increase the difficulties somewhat, yet she would take no denial.

"What's all this fuss for? False pride," she said. "You've got to think for me the way I want you to think, not the way you want to think. If we know we're right, why should we fret if all the rest of the world thought different? I want you and I want a new world. And you will be my new world for that matter."

"I know that."

"Together, then. 'Twould spoil all any other way. 'Twould be cringing to the Vale."

He laughed.

"I can't keep you here in the rain all night. The next thing is our post office—from now on."

"Promise about my going with you."

"That means thinking over all the plans again."

"Think them over again, then; and I'll help. And I've found the post office. List!"

They kept silence for half a minute, but Dinah had only heard a night-bird.

"'Tis here!" she said, "twenty yards down the lane. I found it in the spring—a wrenny's nest hid under the ivy on the bank. No better place. 'Tis empty now and snug as need be."

He accompanied her to the spot, lit matches and examined the proposed post office. It was safe enough, for the snug, domed nest lay completely hidden under a shower of ivy, and Dinah had only discovered it by seeing the little birds pop in when they were building.

Lawrence doubted; it seemed a frail receptacle for vital news; but it was dry and as safe as possible.

"I'd thought to put a tobacco tin under a stone somewhere," he said, "but perhaps this couldn't be beat."

He took careful note of it and marked the exact spot as well as he could in the dark. A sapling grew in the hedge opposite and he took his knife and blazed the bark behind, where only he, or Dinah, would find the cut.

"There'll be a letter for you in a few days," she said, "for I know I've forgot a thousand things; and when your new plans be finished, you'll write 'em for me."

"We must go slow and steady," he answered. "I've got to give Joe warning presently, and I don't mean to be out of work longer than I can help. When we know what we're going to do to the day, then I'll speak; and he won't like it none too well. He's terrible under the weather about Susan."

He told her the Falcon Farm news, with details which she had not heard.

"I'm sorry for Cousin Joe, but mighty glad for Susan, and I'm coming up one day to supper to congratulate her."

"It will be something just to look at you across the table," he said, "but we'd best speak little to each other."

Dinah grew listless as the moment for leave-taking came. Her mood was shadowed.

"I know it's right and wise to keep apart now," she told him. "And I know we can never have none of the old faces round us when we're married, and none of the little pleasures that go with old friends. It's small, but I am sorry."

"So am I, for your sake," he answered. "And it's not small. It's natural. This is the only home you know, and the only folks you know are in it. It only looks small against the bigger thing of being together for evermore. The time won't be long. And there's plenty of new friends waiting for us down under."

"It's cruel of life," she cried. "It's hard and cruel of life to make love like ours so difficult. Open air, daylight creatures, like us, to be called to plot and scheme and hide against the silliness of the world. Just the things I hate most."

"I feel it too—I hate it more than you do—knowing what you are. It will soon be over."

"I'll come up and look at you anyhow," said Dinah. "That won't shock the people; and I dare say, now that Susan knows what it is to love a man—but don't you fear. I won't kiss you even with my eyes, Lawrence."

"Susan wouldn't see nothing for that matter," he said. "Love be a dour pastime for her and Palk as things are. They be like us in a way—frightened to look at each other under that roof."

Then they parted, to meet no more in secret until they should never part again.

He scarcely regretted her determination to sail

with him, as he tramped home. In his present spirit, sharing her indignation that his fellow-men would thrust him away from Dinah for ever if they could, he cared little more than she for what their world might say and think when they had vanished from it.

CHAPTER XXXI

JOE'S SUNDAY

MELINDA STOOD at her door and spoke to her neighbour, Mr. Harry Ford, the gardener. He was a red-whiskered man of fifty, and he and Mrs. Honeysett viewed life somewhat similarly.

"You bad creature," she said, "working in your garden o' Sunday!"

This was the sort of remark on which Harry never wasted speech. He went on with his digging.

"I wish the second early potatoes were coming up so well at the Court as they are here in my little patch," he remarked.

He rested a moment.

"How's Jerry going on?" he asked. "Have it come right?"

"No, I'm sorry to say; and yet not sorry neither. She's keeping all this up because he vexed her Easter Monday. They was at Ashburton revel together, and she says he took a drop too much and very near ran the trap over Holne Bridge and broke her neck coming home. And he says no such thing. But the real trouble is about the blessed shop Jane wants to start at Ashburton after marriage. She's for a

tobacco shop, and Jerry wants for it to be green-grocer's, where he can do his part. I never much liked her I may tell you, no more didn't my father."

"He must have been a bit of a wonder—a very clever man, they say."

"He was a clever man."

"Did he believe in the ghost in my house, Mrs. Honeysett?"

"He did not—no more than you do."

He paused and looked at her. Melinda appeared more than usually attractive. She was in her Sunday gown—a black one, for she still mourned her parent; but she had brightened it with some mauve satin bows, and she wore her best shoes with steel buckles.

"There is a ghost in the house, however," declared the gardener.

"Never!"

"Yes—the ghost of a thought in my mind," he explained.

"Ideas do grow."

"If they stick, then they grow. Now I'll ax you a question, and you've no call to answer it if you don't want. You might say 'twas a hole in my manners to ax, perhaps."

"I'm sure you wouldn't make a hole in your manners, Mr. Ford."

"I hope not. 'Tis this, then. What might the late Mr. Withycombe have thought of Farmer Stockman up the hill?"

Melinda parried the question.

"Well, you never can say exactly what one man thinks of another, because time and chance changes the opinion. A man will vex you to-day and please you next week."

"But he'd made up his mind in a general way about his character?"

"I suppose he had."

"I know he had."

"How should you know?"

"Because I was at the trouble to find out."

"Fancy!"

"Yes. I sounded a man here and there. I went to Chaffe, the carpenter."

"Arthur Chaffe knew father very well and respected him, though he didn't hold with his opinions about religion."

"Religion I never touch—too kicklish a subject. But I spoke to Chaffe, and being friendly disposed to me—and why not?—he said a thing I might be allowed to name to you in confidence."

"Certainly," said Melinda, "if it's nothing against my father."

"Far from it. And I hope you'll take it as 'tis meant."

"I always take everything like that."

"That's right, then. Well, Chaffe, knowing me for a pretty quiet man and a hater of gossip, told me the late fox-hunter saw very clear you'd go to Joe Stockman after he was took——"

"How could he?"

"Well, I don't know how he could. But he did. And though too tender to whisper it in your ear, he told Chaffe that he was sorry!"

"Good Lord, you surprise me!"

"And I felt somehow that if your father—such a man as him—felt sorry, there was a reason why he should. And I won't deny but I told Chaffe he ought to mention it to you. He wouldn't, because he said the thing was too far gone."

"What's gone too far?"

"You know best. But people have ears and Stockman's got a tongue."

Mrs. Honeysett showed annoyance, while Harry returned to his potatoes.

"You're telling me what I know, however," she said. "I know he's talking."

"The only thing that matters to know is your own mind, not what's in other people's, or in his."

At this moment a black-coated figure appeared on the high road and, much to Mr. Ford's regret, turned up the lane to the cottages.

"Talk of——!" he said.

It was Mr. Stockman.

"He's coming here and—and—I hoped something weren't going to happen for the minute," confessed Melinda; "but now I reckon it may be."

"Well, if you're in doubt, nobody else is," said Mr. Ford, striking boldly. "Farmer's sounding his victory far and near—not a very witty thing to do when an old man's after a young woman."

Melinda ignored the compliment and viewed the approaching figure with impassive features.

"He's cut the ground from under his own feet as to his age," she answered, "for if you cry out you're old before your time, of course people must believe you."

Mr. Ford could not answer, for Stockman was within earshot.

He showed a holiday humour, but reproved Harry.

"Working o' Sunday!" he said.

"There's all sorts o' work, master," replied the gardener. "I dare say now that the better the

day the better the deed holds of your job so well as mine."

"You're a sharp one! And how's Melinda?"

"Very well," she said. "You wasn't to church this morning."

"I was not. I meant coming down the hill again this afternoon, to drink a dish of tea with you, if you please; and though twice up and down the hill be nought to me, yet I shirked it."

They went in together.

"The time has come, Melinda," said Mr. Stockman.

"You've let 'em name the day, then—Susan and Thomas?"

"No such thing; but they'll be naming it themselves pretty soon. They'll be away in a month or two, I expect. And I want for the house to be swept and garnished then. There's wicked words being said about my treatment of my child."

"There's wicked words being said about a lot of things. It's been said, for instance, up and down the Vale, that you've told a score you be going to marry me, Joe. That's a proper wicked thing, I should think."

He was much concerned.

"Good God! What a nest of echoes we live in! But there it is. When a thing's in the air—whether 'tis fern seed, or a bit of scandal, or a solemn truth, it will settle and stick and grow till the result appears. No doubt the general sense of the folk, knowing how I've felt to you for years, made up this story and reckoned it was one of they things that Providence let out before the event. Marriages be made in Heaven, they say, Melinda."

"But they ain't blazed abroad on earth, I believe, afore both parties choose to mention it."

"Most certainly not; but if you move in the public eye, people will be talking."

"Yes, they will, if they be started talking. I met Ann Slocombe to Lower Town three days ago and she congratulated me on my engagement to you."

"Who the devil's Ann Slocombe?"

"She's a woman very much like other women. And I told her it was stuff and nonsense, and far ways from anything that had happened, or was going to happen."

"No need to have said that, I hope. 'Tis the curious case of——"

"'Tis the curious case of talking before you know," said Melinda tartly. "What would you have thought if I'd told people you'd gone down to Brixham to offer yourself to a woman there?"

"God's my judge I——"

Mr. Stockman broke off.

"This is very ill-convenient, Melinda, and quite out of tune with me and the day, and what's in my mind. If I've spoke of you with great affection to one or two tried friends—friends now no more—then I can only ax you to overlook their freedom of speech. I've been in a very awkward position for a long time, and, made of justice as you are, you must see it. For look how things fell out. First, just as I was coming to the great deed and going to ax you to be mistress of Falcon Farm, there happened your dear father's grievous illness and his death. Well, I couldn't jump at you with my heart in my hand while you was crying your eyes out and feeling your fearful loss. And then, just as the clouds were

lifting and the way clear, what happened? My misguided girl takes this false step. And that cut two ways. First there was the disaster itself, and then, in a flash, I saw that if I came to you on top of it, enemies—not you, yourself, I well knew that—enemies would be bitter quick to say I was doing it from no honour and respect to you, but to suit my own convenience, because Susan was off.”

“You can make a case, of course, but——”

“Let me finish. I ban’t here to argue, Melinda. We’ve known each other a good long time now, and it have been the bright ray in a troublous life, your friendship for me. We looked at things from the same point of view, and took high opinions, and laughed when we ought to laugh, and was serious in due season. And good men are scarce and good women far scarcer. And there never was and never will be a better woman than you. I want you, not for this or that accident of life as have fallen upon me, but just the same as I have wanted you any time these ten years. So you must sweep such trifles out of your mind and come to the question with no bias, but just your honest feelings to me and your memory of the past. So there it lies, my dear.”

Mrs. Honeysett hesitated a few moments before replying—not because she was in any doubt as to her answer, but from a native sense that all must be done decently and in order.

Joe made the best of the situation, and probably, had Melinda’s attitude to him remained unchanged, a look back into memory, as he suggested, might have won the day for Mr. Stockman. She was conscious that a year ago she would have pardoned his errors of egotism.

She even suspected that, as things were, they did not really lie at the root of the matter. But the root of the matter extended into new ground. Here, however, she could not pursue it. She only told herself that she would never marry Mr. Stockman now.

"Us have had a very fine friendship indeed, Joe," she admitted, "and, in my humble opinion, it would be a terrible mistake to spoil it this way. For, say what you may, friendship ain't love and love ain't friendship; and I do feel, betwixt me and you, it might be a sad pity to lose the substance for the shadow."

"You talk as if love would end friendship, instead of double it, Melinda," he answered; but he was quick-minded and he knew the woman meant to decline him. The thought immeasurably troubled Mr. Stockman, for he had assumed success to be certain. He made a very strenuous effort to prove that there is no friendship like that of married people. He argued, also, that such an understanding as had obtained between him and Melinda since his wife's death was sufficient foundation for a very perfect and distinguished union.

She admitted that it might be so, but declined the experiment.

"I'm very well inclined to you, Joe, and you've been a figure in my life for years, and will so continue, I hope; but marriage with you don't draw me. You've been like an elder brother to me, and I hope you'll see your way to remain so. 'Twould spoil all if we went into marriage. And, in a word, I couldn't do it."

"This is a very painful shock," he answered. "Somehow, such was you to me, that I felt the

step could only be a matter of time; and what's more, Melinda, you never did nothing to make me feel otherwise—quite the contrary, in fact. However, we'll not go into that side. You know what I mean."

"I do; and we will go into it, Joe, and have done with it. If you think I encouraged you——"

"What do you think?"

"Never—God's my judge! I was proud of being your friend, and I got plenty of good advice from you; and you often took a hint from me also. But nothing tender ever passed between us—never."

"That depends on what you call tenderness. I did most honestly believe you felt more than friendship for me, and I showed as much, by a lot of touches that a quick woman like you couldn't have mistook. No, no, Melinda, that won't do. You knew."

"I'll take the blame, then, if you think I ought."

"Don't talk of blame. Consider if you ain't making a mistake. You're wasted single, and here's a tidy sort of man offering; and all his is yours, from the hour you say 'yes.' Weigh it. I know only too well what I'll lose if you don't come to me. In fairness, then, you did ought to consider if you don't lose pretty heavy too."

"Of course. To lose your friendship would be a very great disaster for me, Joe. It's been a steadfast and lasting thing, and I should feel a cruel lot was gone if that was gone. No; leave it as 'tis between us, my dear man. Let's be friends and forget this. I'll get 'e a cup of tea."

"As to friends, you don't quite see what you're doing yet, I'm afraid. You'm acting in a way

that throws down the past, Melinda, and makes you like the rough and tumble of women—them with no fixed views and opinions, as don't know their own mind—if they've got minds to know. I'll leave you in hope that you'll think this thing out and find you're on the edge of a mistake. I never thought I'd misunderstood you like this. Indeed, if I had fancied there was a doubt, I should have been too proud to offer at all."

He rose and prepared to depart.

Mrs. Honeysett, glad that he remained calm, was also thankful that he should go.

"I'll never lose sight of you in my mind, or in my prayers," she said.

"I came in full sail," he answered; "now I go off like a ship without a mast, or a rudder."

He left her in deep dejection, which warmed to anger before he had reached home. He convinced himself that Melinda had played him false. For years there had been an implicit understanding in his mind that he had but to put forth his hand to take. The effect of her refusal was bad. Mr. Stockman saw his stable world reeling about him. He had barely recovered from the shock of Susan's engagement, and now, after carefully rebuilding his future environment and allowing himself to dwell philosophically on the bright side of it, he found all in ruins and a necessity for fresh plans.

And that same evening, after supper, when Thomas Palk and Susan had crept out for a walk, Lawrence Maynard came to the master of Falcon Farm and gave notice.

"There's no hurry," he said. "I'm at your service, master, so long as you want me; but

I've made up my mind to leave England in the autumn and see a bit of the world before it's too late. I think to go by Michaelmas, or a bit after—to Australia very like—and take up land."

To Maynard's amazement Joe turned upon him with something almost of fury. His cowman knew not of Joe's earlier reverse and all that he had that day been called to endure.

"What—what are you telling me? You going too? You ungrateful devil! You thankless, selfish toad! What have I done—what on God's earth have I done—to be turned down and flouted and tormented at every step of my life in this way? A man whose every act and thought be kindness for other people; and now every man's hand against me! Persecution I call it; and you—you, who have had to thank me for far more than goes between master and man; you, as I have offered friendship to, and trusted and treated more like a son than a servant! You ought to be shamed to the marrow in your bones to think to leave me—an old, careworn, ill-used wretch with one foot in the grave and all the world turning its back on him."

"Don't—don't!" said Lawrence. "Don't take on like that. There's no hurry for a few months. I've been very proud and grateful for all you've done for me, Mr. Stockman."

"Get out of my sight," answered the other. "There's no honesty, nor honour, nor plain dealing left in man or woman, so far as I can see. It's a hell of a world, and I wish a good few people as I could name, yourself included, had never come into it. My lines have fallen in shameful places, and if I wasn't too old, I'd shake

the dust off my shoes against this blasted Buckland and everybody in it."

Then Maynard retreated and left Joe panting heavily and staring into the kitchen fire.

He had gone to bed when Susan returned, and she and Tom and Maynard mumbled in low voices for an hour while the latter described his experience. To Stockman's daughter this outburst signified far more than it did to either of the men, for she guessed upon what business her father had been employed that afternoon, and now knew that a terrible disappointment must have overtaken him. She wept half the night on his account and mourned not a little on her own.

CHAPTER XXXII

JANE AND JERRY

UNDER THE FIRST GREY OF DAWN, Maynard posted a letter in the wrens' nest and then proceeded down the hill to Lower Town. He was on an errand from Falcon Farm to Mr. Chaffe, and then he would proceed to a farm on the Moor, about the purchase of two heifers. For Stockman had long since found that Lawrence knew as much concerning cattle as himself. The present arrangements had been made before the cowman gave notice, and his latest letter to Dinah chronicled the fact that he had done so. The letter-box worked well and many communications had been exchanged. Dinah's were full of love and ardour. They would sail from Plymouth for Australia presently, and they would be married at Sydney as soon as possible after landing. Maynard's money was more than enough and their passages would be state-aided. Preliminaries were complete and there remained only to fix their place of meeting and date of sailing. Then they would simultaneously disappear.

Mr. Chaffe was already in his workshop when Maynard appeared.

"Early birds both!" said he. "I know what you've come about, however. Joe wants me to

look into his stables, where the dry rot have got, and see how much must come out and be made good."

"That's right, Mr. Chaffe."

"I've been waiting and expecting it since Palk made the sad discovery. But no doubt your master has his mind pretty full."

"He has, I'm afraid. A few days ago I gave notice, because I'm going farther afield before I'm too old, and he took it very bad indeed."

"My! You going too? Where?"

"To Australia. I want to see a bit of life and start fresh."

"And Joe didn't like it?"

"No; but there's nothing to get so savage about that I can see."

"He'd come to look at you as part of his show. No doubt, falling on his other troubles — But he knows where to look for comfort, I should hope. After all, it's but a passing thing. I always say that we who live in a Vale ought to know what a vale means. This is all meant to make him think of Beyond."

"Thought of the next world don't make trouble anything less than trouble."

"A very dangerous opinion, Maynard, and I'm sorry you think so. That ain't the Christian standpoint, and you know it."

"Your views are behind the times perhaps."

"Far from it: they're ahead of the times. It's the still, small voice ain't heard in these days. The world knows its noisiest men, not its greatest; and so it don't know its Saviour—not even yet."

"It's no sense praising earthly misery to humans, because they're built to hate misery and seek happiness."

"I don't praise misery. I only say that happiness must be looked for in the next world, not this one. It don't belong here and never will."

Maynard shook his head.

"I've thought of these things and I see your Church standing between man and a lot of his happiness. Let the Church help to clear up the cruel mess in this world—not increase it. While you demand injustice, you'll only lose your friends. Take marriage. You won't let marriage be a human thing, nor yet divorce. You let marriage be a trap for people—easy to get in, impossible to get out—then you've got the face to say it's God's will—the God of love and mercy!"

"I'm sorry to hear you talk in this wicked way," answered Arthur.

"Keep your eyes open and see how life goes; and you'll see there's hundreds and hundreds of poor people living in misery to-day, because you say God brought 'em together, instead of the Devil."

"I must try to larn you better if I can. You stand on very dangerous ground, and your little bit o' learning's like a Jack o' Lantern—it'll land you in a bog if you don't watch it."

They talked but did not convince each other. Then Lawrence went his way, leaving in the mind of Mr. Chaffe considerable uneasiness.

Meantime there had happened behind Lawrence Maynard's back a thing of much import. Though the hour was still early, two people entered the lane through the woods some fifty minutes after he had descended it, and their arrival synchronised at the region of the ivy bank

and the wrens' nest. A few seconds more would have seen Jerry Withycombe past the spot, on his way to work in the valley; but chance so willed it that, as he rounded a bend on his way, he saw beneath him, but still far distant, a woman's sun-bonnet, and he recognised its faded blue. She with whom his melancholy thoughts were concerned was evidently approaching, and the fact that she should be out so early, and on the way she knew he must be travelling to his work, created sudden, deep emotion in the woodman. His quarrel with Jane bulked larger in his eyes than in hers. She continued to be obdurate about a trifle, from no opinion that the trifle really mattered, but because it gave her a sense of freedom and a loophole if she so desired. She continued to be fond of Jerry, and it wanted no great change of mind to bring them together. Indeed she proposed ere long to make it up. And now it seemed as though she were about to do so, and had put herself to trouble and risen early to meet him on his way.

A few moments, however, brought large disappointment for the man. At sight of the sun-bonnet, he had backed and waited to watch. Now he quickly perceived the approaching figure was not Jane's slim shape, but Dinah's ampler proportions. He was cast down from a great hope and scowled at the innocent Dinah. Then a ray of light shot his darkness, for it occurred to him that Dinah might be a messenger of good tidings. At any rate the sun-bonnet was Jane's—picked up haphazard no doubt, when Dinah set forth.

He waited and watched a few moments before proceeding, then marked Dinah stop and do a

strange thing. She had not come to seek him, it seemed, after all; but something she sought and something she found.

In truth the lover of Lawrence was there to leave a letter. She did not expect one and was the more delighted to find the note left an hour before. Jerry saw her peep about, to be sure she was alone, then go to the green bank, insert her hand and bring out a small white object from the ivy. She stood and evidently read a letter. Still he held back, in great wonder at this scene. Dinah next produced something from her own pocket, opened it and appeared to write. She was adding a few words to the note that she had brought. She then put it in the nest and was quickly gone again down the hill.

Jerry waited till Dinah had disappeared; then, having marked the spot where she stood, he shouldered his frail and proceeded. Already he had a suspicion of the truth and presently made cautious search under the ivy-curtain. Nothing rewarded him until he found the old nest and a piece of paper therein. It was folded closely but conveyed no information on the outside. He held it in his hand a few moments and his mind worked in a selfish direction. Here was an item of tremendous interest to one person. He did not doubt that the letter was intended for a man, and felt very sure the fact proved his own sweetheart's assurance: that Dinah was secretly engaged, if not married. His thoughts were with Jane, and it seemed to him that chance had now thrown him an admirable opportunity to win her back. For such a secret as this would be meat and drink to her. Nor need it hurt Dinah. Jerry had not the slightest desire to hurt anybody; but

he felt that his information might be well worth Jane's forgiveness; and if Dinah were indeed courting a local man, no harm could befall either her or him by the fact of their secret escaping. There might be a good joke in it: that anything to distress and confound the secret lovers could spring from his discovery he did not guess.

To him, then, this post office of Dinah and an unknown appeared a great and delightful find, capable of doing him a very good turn. It meant a triumph for Jane—a sort of triumph she would appreciate; but it also meant a bargain that should recover Jane's friendship before completion.

He restored the folded paper to its place, marked the spot very carefully and was content to leave the rest to Jane. She would have to see him, and that for the moment she declined to do; but he proposed to himself a visit after his day's work and doubted not that, if he pressed it forcibly enough, she might consent.

That night he called at Green Hayes and it was Dinah who answered his knock. Jerry felt uncomfortable, but salved his conscience and invited her friendship.

She, knowing very well why he was come, left him and returned to the kitchen.

"Jerry wants to see you half a minute, Jane," she said. "He won't keep you, but he's got something to say as you must hear. It's a wonderful thing, he says, and will interest you a lot."

Jane, however, showed no immediate inclination to respond.

"Like his cheek," she said. "Didn't I tell the know-nought fool that when I wanted him I'd let him know?"

"Well, he wants you. And he's bursting with

news, seemingly. He begged me very earnest to ask you to see him."

"Perhaps his patience is out," said Mrs. Bamsey. "Perhaps he's come to give you up, Jane."

"No," she said. "I ban't feared of that. I only want him to see sense over a little matter here and there."

Jane's secrets were secrets no longer. Her dream of a shop at Ashburton was now common knowledge.

"You've kept it up long enough if you really want him," said her mother.

"What should he have to tell me, except he's come round to my views?" asked Jane.

"Perhaps he has," replied Dinah.

Jane rose and went out. There was a mumble of voices. Then Dinah and Faith heard her go down the garden path with Jerry.

"Thank goodness that's over," said Dinah. "Now you'll have peace, Mrs. Bamsey."

"I don't know," answered the elder. "They're not really well suited. Jane did ought to have taken a town man."

"She'll break him in to bricks and mortar after a bit," prophesied Dinah. "They love each other properly enough."

"If that was so, there'd be no talk of breaking in," said Jane's mother.

Meantime Jerry had spoken.

"It's very kind of you to see me," he said, "and you won't regret it. I've got a great piece of news for you, and it's a triumph for you, Jane, and if you agree to come round and make it up and be same as you was, I'll tell you."

"What's the great news you'd be likely to hear?"

"I didn't hear it: I found it out. And it'll be a lot more to you than me for that matter."

They talked like children.

"Very well, then, I'll hear it."

"And be friends?"

"I'll be friends, if it's such great news as you say."

"No; that means you'll go back on it after. You must be friends. And we'll regard it still open about the shop. And you needn't fear my news ain't great. 'Tis a triumph for you, and everybody will say so."

Jane's triumphs were few. She considered. She had not the faintest idea of the matter in his mind, yet was glad to be close to him again and hear his voice.

"All right, then," she said. "The shop can wait."

"Will you come out for an hour? Then you shall see something, as well as hear tell about it."

She turned, picked up the sun-bonnet that Dinah had donned in the morning, and followed him.

He made her kiss him, and then they went up the hill as he told his story in every particular.

"And why for I've fetched you out," he said, "is because you shall see it with your own eyes."

She was deeply interested.

"And 'tis greatly to your credit," declared Jerry, "for you've seen through it from the first, like the clever one you are."

"It fits in very suent," she answered, "because Maynard's given warning and be off presently; and if 'tis him, then no doubt they'll be off together."

"Why all this secret business?" asked Jerry. "There's no law against 'em marrying if they want to. What be they shamed of?"

"Can't you see that? The man who's after Dinah must know all about the past and how she served John. He's feared of John."

"Then I do beg you'll respect their secret plans so far," urged Jerry. "I'm not telling you this for any mischief against anybody. I only wanted for you to have the pleasure of finding yourself in the right; and I thought 'twould be a bit of fun to let everybody know of it, and surprise Dinah and him and have a laugh at 'em—all friendly and well meaning."

But Jane was not prepared to lose the salt of the adventure for Jerry, or anybody. She kept her intentions secret, however.

"John's not a fool. I didn't mean that he'd do anything. I only meant that the man, whoever he is, feels frightened of him. Of course there's no reason why he should be. Only a coward would be."

"If 'tis to be a laughing matter, I'll go on—not else," vowed Jerry; but she assured him that nothing but laughter would end the incident in any case.

They climbed the hill and he picked up his marks; then bade Jane light matches while he hunted for the nest. It was quickly found; she put her hand in and drew out Dinah's letter deposited that morning.

"He haven't come for it yet," said Jerry. "So us had better be moving, for he might be on his way this minute."

But Jane delayed and held the letter in her hand.

"If he only comes by night, we shall never find out who it is," she answered.

There was an obvious desire in her mind; but she guessed what Jerry would think of it and so kept it hidden and returned the letter to the nest.

"Well, you're a great wonder to find this out," she said, "and I'll keep my word and be friends. Don't you whisper a word to a soul yet. Leave it to me."

"They'll puzzle like fury to know how it slipped out, and us'll all roar with laughter at 'em, I expect."

Indeed, he laughed in anticipation.

"Hush!" she said. "The man may be on his way now. I'll see you Sunday afternoon. And I'll find out for sure who the chap is by then, if I've got to hide and watch for him."

Jerry was overjoyed and embraced her.

"Sunday, then, and thank God we'm all right again, and us must never fall out no more, Jane."

Then they parted, each promising the other to keep a sharp look-out on any passer-by. Jerry went his way in the best possible spirits and Jane started to run down the hill. But she did not run far, and after her lover was out of the way she stole back. She had kept his box of matches, and now did a thing Jerry had probably forbidden. Not perhaps that his objection might have stopped her, but Jane's mind moved swiftly. Before all else it was desirable to find out the man, and she felt that nobody but a fool would waste time in detective operations while so simple an expedient as opening a letter offered. She had observed that Dinah's missive was merely folded, not sealed, and now she returned to the nest, found it and satisfied herself. Jane's honesty reached a point

that amply soothed conscience. She had no intention to read the letter: that she would have held an improper action; but if the first words indicated the recipient, as she doubted not they would, then a great deal of time and trouble might be saved.

Jane opened the letter, having first listened that no approaching footfall broke the silence. Then she struck another match, read the words, "My darling Man," and hesitated. The match went out and she stood with the letter in her hand. Experience told her, from her own occasional communications to Jerry, that one might begin with an endearing but vague term and yet, at some later point in one's communication, mention the loved object by name. Dinah's large, free handwriting was easily seen and Jane considered that it would be possible to skim the letter, without really reading it, on the chance of finding the information she desired. This reasoning was rewarded, for, on the second sheet, as her eyes flickered along the lines, the name "Lawrence" very clearly appeared. Then she stopped, dropped her match, folded the letter carefully, restored it to its place and was gone.

"There's only one 'Lawrence' in these parts," thought Jane. Her reflections were now entirely with her brother. She did not echo Jerry's wish, that the matter should end in laughter, and, clever though Jane was in some directions, there was a streak of malevolent idiocy about her in others. She now cherished a vague opinion that the man ought to suffer for his secret love-making. She despised him and rejoiced to think that John might do something drastic in the matter. That Maynard should be called upon to suffer seemed

entirely reasonable to Jane; while, as far as Dinah was concerned, she panted with delight that her little schemes were now to be made as public as the bird's-nest she had trusted with them. She hated Dinah and had always done so.

"And she shall know who she's got to thank, too," reflected the maiden; "there wouldn't be much in it for me if she didn't hear who'd found her out."

Full of these unamiable intentions, Jerry's sweetheart returned home and announced that she and her lover were reconciled.

"Thank the Lord for that, then," cried Dinah. "And don't you give him a chance to quarrel again. 'Tis good time lost, Jane."

"You mind your own love affairs," answered the other tartly. "Us all know you've got 'em; but be too shamed of 'em, seemingly, to make 'em public."

With this crushing response Jane retired, while Dinah stared after her.

"Don't mind the girl," said Faith Bamsey. "You be such a woman of mystery that you mustn't quarrel with people if they fling their words at you."

"I don't want to quarrel with anybody, Mrs. Bamsey," answered Dinah.

CHAPTER XXXIII

JOE HEARS THE SECRET

SUSAN AND THOMAS were returning from Church, where they had sat solemnly together and heard their banns called for the first time of asking. Mr. Stockman, informed that this would happen, declined to go; indeed of late he had worshipped but seldom, permitting personal trials to check his devotions. The betrothed pair discussed Susan's father on the way home, and Palk held it an impropriety that Mr. Stockman should not have been present.

"Out of respect to you, he did ought to have been there," he said; "and it's a very oneasy thing; because the next we shall hear may be that he won't come to the wedding neither."

"He's a regular Job for the minute—first one treasure took and then another, till I dare say he feels the Lord have turned from him," thought Susan.

"Not at all. Nought have overtook him that ain't well inside the common lot. Look at the items—firstly, his daughter gets engaged to be married to his hossman—a thing that ought to rejoice him instead of cast him down; secondly, his cowman gives notice—a thing that may happen to any farmer; and thirdly, yonder woman won't take him."

Thomas pointed where, fifty yards ahead of them, Melinda and her brother were walking home from church.

Soosie-Toosie nodded mournfully.

"And that's a very harsh blow for father anyway. He'd always counted he could fall back on Melinda, like you put by a nest egg for the rainy day. And I'm a good bit disappointed in that quarter—quite as much as father, in fact. But you mustn't whisper it, Tom; because of course the world ain't supposed to know father offered and got turned down."

"Other people won't pretend if we do," answered Mr. Palk. "He blew the trumpet about it himself, and everybody well understands that Mrs. Honeysett refused him."

"I'd give a fortune to know why," answered Joe's daughter. "Some day I'll ax her, I shouldn't wonder."

They overtook Melinda, and while Thomas talked with Jerry, the women fell back and Susan spoke of private affairs. She explained her gathering difficulties and Melinda listened with a good deal of sympathy.

"'Tis very undignified of your father, Susan—more like a naughty child, than a man with fame for sense. I allow for him, because a good few things have happened to shake him; yet, so far as you and Mr. Palk are concerned, it did ought to be all joy and gladness."

"So it ought; but far from it," answered the other. "Father's got to such a pass now that when I tell him I'm wishful to name the day he dares me to do so."

"Very wilful and unkind, and something ought to be done about it," declared Mrs. Honeysett.

"I've been thinking a good deal on Joe lately, as I dare say you can guess; and no doubt you know very well why he came to see me a fortnight ago, Soosie. But I don't forget the past and I don't want to lose his friendship, nor yet yours."

They lagged and mumbled together for some time; but it was clear that Melinda's views commended themselves much to Susan, and when they joined Jerry and Thomas at the turn to Mrs. Honeysett's house, Joe Stockman's daughter thanked her friend gratefully for some inspiring suggestions.

She talked without ceasing to Tom all the way home, and he listened and nodded and declared there might be a good deal in it.

"'Tis a great thought," he said, "and if you feel kind to it, then I might."

"'Tis a sort of bargain of course," admitted Susan; "but you wouldn't call it a one-sided bargain."

"Not at all. It lets him out so as he can save his face before the folk."

Thomas thought it might be possible to speak at the end of that day.

"I'll ax him to have a spot out of my bottle to-night," he said, "and if he condescends so far as to do so, then I'll open on him—not otherwise."

Mr. Palk was disappointed, however, for during the evening there came in John Bamsey to supper.

He appeared to be in a good temper and hid the object of his visit until after the meal was ended. He spoke chiefly of his own work on the river, and then of his father. Mr. Bamsey had sunk to be the mere husk of a man, and his son frankly hoped that he might soon pass away.

"To know he was dead wouldn't be half so wisht as to see him alive like this," he said.

John was tactful with regard to Susan and Thomas. Indeed, he congratulated them out of earshot of Cousin Joe, and hoped it would be all right. To Maynard he was civil and no more.

Then, when opportunity came to do so, unheard by anybody else, he asked Mr. Stockman to walk out and smoke a pipe as he had something private to tell him. Joe was bored, for no affairs but his own interested him at this moment; but he obliged the younger, and through a warm, thundery night they strolled upon the Beacon. For a time the elder uttered general grievances, and when he mentioned Lawrence Maynard, John struck in.

"That's why I wanted to get you away from them. There's a bit of news about Maynard; but perhaps you know it. And when it's out, he's got to reckon with me."

"Maynard's a very disappointing chap," declared the farmer. "Never did I like a man better, and never did I treat a man better, and I'm quite reasonable in that quarter when I say this is no ordinary case of a hand giving notice. He's outside his right to do any such thing with me; for I've been as good as a father to him for very near two years, and he's got no justice or honesty in him to go."

"No, there's not much honesty or justice in him. And I dare say you wondered why he was going."

"I wondered certainly."

"I'll tell you. He's going to be married, and he couldn't dare to be married here, because he knew that he'd got me to reckon with. So he's planned it on the quiet, and he'll disappear

presently, no doubt; and then somebody else will disappear too. And that's Dinah Waycott."

Mr. Stockman was much agitated.

"Good powers! D'you know what you're saying, John?" he asked.

"Very well indeed. And I'll tell you how it was; but I don't want Maynard to know his dirty job be found out, and I'll beg you to keep dumb about it till things are a bit forwarder. I can get forty shillings or a month out of him, and give him a damned good hiding and disgrace him for his underhand, blackguard conduct—stealing another man's girl—but I want to do a bit more than that if it's in my power. I'd do a lot to break this off and punish Dinah, same as she punished me; and why not? She deserves it quite so well as him."

"Begin at the beginning," said Joe. "Tell me what you know. I'm your side without a doubt in this matter. There's a lot hid here you don't understand, and, for the credit of human nature, I hope you're wrong. This may be something that you've given ear to, out of ill feeling against Orphan Dinah. You must be terrible sure of your ground, for there's very good reasons why you ought to be mistaken."

Johnny, who had learned everything from Jane, told the story with only one addition contrary to facts. Jane lied in a minor particular and concealed the incident of looking into Dinah's letter. Instead she declared that she had hidden herself, and watched, and seen Maynard come for the letter and leave another on the following evening in late dusk. The conclusion amounted to the same thing.

Joe was deeply impressed.

"I always held him a bit sly," he said, "and I've lived to find him ungrateful and hard-hearted where I'd every right to expect something very different. He struck me at the very moment when a decent man would have scorned to do so, with all my own troubles thick upon me. But this is something a lot worse."

"I'm glad you think so," answered John. "I'm very glad you see he's a secret, cowardly sort. He kindiddled Dinah away from me, no doubt; and if you don't think he ought to marry her, then I hope you'll help me to prevent it."

Johnny felt exalted. He had not expected much from his visit to his kinsman; he had even feared that Joe might already know the facts and attach no importance to them; but it seemed that Mr. Stockman was quite of John's opinion. Indeed he declared so.

"I certainly think they can't marry," he answered. "And I think a great deal more than that. Keep your mouth shut close for the present. There's plenty of time—unless."

"When's the man going?"

"No date be fixed."

"My mother was put out when Dinah went off a bit ago. She got the idea from Jane that Dinah had gone to be married then. But when they taxed her, she swore she had not."

"She couldn't tell a lie if she was paid to," declared Mr. Stockman, "and Maynard certainly weren't in that, because he was here and I saw him every day about his business. We must rest the blame on the right pair of shoulders. And it'll break 'em without a doubt. But we'd best to go careful. Don't you take a step alone. How many know?"

"Only Jane and Jerry and me."

"Maynard don't suspect?"

"Neither of 'em—they couldn't."

"Then tell your sister and Withycombe to keep dumb as mice for the minute. This is a very serious thing indeed—and a great shock to me. To think he was that sort!"

John was pleased but mystified. He failed to see why this event should make so tremendous an impression on Mr. Stockman.

"I'm very glad you think it bad," he said. "I was in a bit of doubt if you'd take my side."

"As to sides," answered Joe, "I'm going to take the side of right, which is no more than to say I'll do my duty. I dare say you are a bit astonished, but understand me. I'm not making your quarrel mine, and I don't hold at all with your talk about forty shillings or a month out of Lawrence Maynard. This goes a very great deal deeper than forty shillings or a month, I may tell you. I'll say no more for the minute; but I shan't do nought till I've seen you again. Only keep this in mind: Maynard ain't planning this hookem-snivey job and doing it all in secret because he's afraid of you, but because he's afraid of me."

Johnny became more and more puzzled. It was clear, however, that he had won a powerful friend and might now hope to strike a harder blow than any with his fist.

"So long as you be going to queer the man's pitch, and punish him, and get Dinah away from him, I don't care a damn," he said. "If Dinah finds out; but perhaps he's made her think——"

"Yes; he's made her think a lot, and he's told her a great many dark and devilish falsehoods—that's very clear indeed," answered Joe.

"And if her eyes be opened, she may come back to sense yet!" cried the sanguine youth.

Mr. Stockman did not answer. He was occupied with his own reflections.

"This shakes me to the vitals," he declared presently. "I thought I knew pretty well all there was to that man; and I knew less than nought. If anybody had said he was a wicked scoundrel, I'd have denied and defied it; but——"

They had descended from the Beacon and were walking on the Buckland road. Then Joe stopped.

"You go your way now," he said, "and leave me to put this together. But there may not be any too much time. He was going at Michaelmas. 'Tis certain now that's a blind. He'll take French leave presently and we've got to be before him. Come to supper o' Wednesday, John. Then us'll see how it looks. That poor woman——"

"If he's up to any tricks——"

"He is, by God! Now I'll leave you. And be so silent as the grave till you see me again."

Deeply wondering and greatly rejoicing at his success, John Bamsey went down the hill, while Mr. Stockman turned and slowly ascended. His excitement gave way to listlessness presently, for this discovery and the subsequent sensation could not advance Joe's own problems. He considered for a moment whether any course existed by which advantage could accrue to himself out of Maynard's position; but he saw none.

A trap from Ashburton descended, flashing its lights through the leafy darkness of the road; and when the ray illuminated Mr. Stockman he heard a woman's voice bid the driver pull up. It was Mrs. Honeysett who spoke, and she seized an

opportunity to relieve the existing painful conditions. For she had not seen Joe since she declined him; but here was an excuse and she took it.

"You'll be wondering what I'm doing at this time of night," she said, "but I can't pass you."

Then she alighted and a man alighted with her.

"Just been to Ashburton to meet my brother Robert," she explained. "You remember him. He's home for a bit at last."

A huge figure towered in the gloom over Joe and a heavy hand grasped his own.

"I remember you," said the farmer, "but I forgot you were such a whacker. Sailed all the Seven Seas, I suppose, since you was last to Buckland?"

"He's two inches taller than what dear father was," declared Melinda, relieved to find Mr Stockman in a humour apparently amiable. "Robert's going to take a nice spell along with me. In fact he doubts sometimes if he'll go back to sea at all."

"No, no—I don't doubt that," answered the sailor. "But I be going to give work a rest."

"And find a wife, if he can," continued Melinda. "Us must help him, Joe."

"I always swore as I'd marry a maiden from the Vale," said Robert Withycombe.

"The puzzle will be to find one, I tell him," laughed Melinda. "I know a likely girl all the same, and so does Mr. Stockman, Bob."

Joe guessed to whom she referred, and it showed him that Melinda knew nothing of the threatened tragedy.

"I reckon you mean Orphan Dinah," he said.

"Well and why not? A very sensible young woman. The man that gets her will be lucky."

"They'd be a proper pair and I hope Bob will think well of her. But he must be warned that she's already changed her mind in one quarter."

"That's not against her," replied Joe. "That shows strength of character. I only hope I know another woman who'll be wise enough to change her mind."

Before this veiled attack Melinda was silent, and Robert spoke.

"My girl, when she comes along, won't have no time to change her mind. She've got to marry me and be quick about it. Then us must find a little house to Southampton, or else Plymouth."

Stockman, with certain ideas moving in his head, issued an invitation.

"Perhaps you'll be in luck—who knows? I'd pleasure you for your sister's sake, because she and me are very good friends, and I hope always will be. You come to supper o' Wednesday, Robert, and bring Jerry along with you. I don't ax you, Melinda—not this time. I want to have a tell with your brothers; mind you make 'em come."

"Come and welcome," promised Robert, while his sister wondered what might be behind this invitation. They parted; the trap with the sailor rolled down the hill and Joe proceeded home. He was gloomy and his thoughts concerned themselves with Melinda, but not hopefully. Even if she did, indeed, find herself in a mood to accept him on another invitation, it would never be the same to Mr. Stockman. He did not care for her enough to let any future 'yes' make

him forget the grave rebuff already suffered. Like a skeleton between them must ever persist the recollection of her refusal.

He found himself hating Maynard and taking grim satisfaction in the thought that Lawrence had overreached himself. Here, at any rate, was an outlet for Mr. Stockman's pent-up indignation.

CHAPTER XXXIV

AN OFFER

NOW FORCE WAS RANGED against force, and while Dinah and Lawrence Maynard matured the final details of their exodus, half a dozen men had become aware of their secret enterprise and were concerned to upset it in the name of right. Only the manner of doing so offered material for argument. The situation was reached on the Wednesday night of Joe's supper party, for when John Bamsey duly arrived to learn the secret, he was surprised to find Jerry Withycombe and his brother, Robert, also of the company. Mr. Stockman had so far accepted the inevitable that his friends might discuss Susan's approaching wedding in his presence, and to-night Robert Withycombe chaffed Mr. Palk and Susan while he ate. Presently, indeed, he drank to their united bliss and challenged the rest of the company to do so. Thomas was gratified and Susan felt much moved to see her father humbly drink the toast with the rest. Then the diplomatic Joe asked Robert if he had called at Green Hayes, and what he thought of Jerry's future wife.

Robert praised Jane very heartily.

"She's a bowerly piece," he said, "and clever as they make 'em. What the devil she finds in

this chap I can't guess; but love's blind, no doubt. I shall see 'em hitched up afore I go."

"And yourself too, by all accounts," said Mr. Palk.

"'Tis odds he won't find nobody good enough," declared Jerry. "He fancies himself something cruel, because he's sailed pretty near round the world."

"There's one good enough for any living man at Green Hayes," asserted Mr. Stockman. "Have you seen Orphan Dinah, Robert?"

"I have, and I ain't wishful to talk on that subject in public—not yet," answered the sailor guardedly.

"He's hit—he's hit!" cried Joe. Then he remembered that Johnny was present and turned with a great show of innocence to Maynard, who took his supper with the rest.

"Here's a man that knows Dinah Waycott, and have took a walk or two with her for that matter. And a very clever man too, and I'm terrible sorry he's going to leave me. What would you say of Orphan Dinah, Lawrence?"

Maynard was unruffled.

"Lucky the man who gets her," he answered; "she's one in a thousand."

The talk ranged and John grew more and more impatient to know when vital matters would be reached; but he perceived that Mr. Stockman could not speak before the company. After supper Maynard disappeared, and then, when his daughter had cleared away, Joe beckoned John and took him outside.

"I don't trust my family circle in this matter," he said, "and so we'll light our pipes and go out. 'Tis a moony night and to walk a mile after

supper is a very good rule, though I don't practise it. Call them two men. They've got to know so well as you."

In ten minutes Thomas and Susan had Falcon Farm to themselves, while Joe, with John and the Withycombe brothers, strolled through a still and moonlit night.

Then he told them that Lawrence was married, and had run away from his wife.

"That's how we stand, neighbours. Maynard's a secret sort of man in most of his dealings, but when he came here he found me not lacking in friendship, and he told me that much about himself. And I thought the better of him for it; because it's often the wisest and properest thing that parties can do, to put a few leagues between self and partner, if marriage be poisoning 'em both. He weren't to blame for that, so far as I can tell; indeed, I upheld the man in his action; but now the case is altered, and we may be pretty sure the fault was his and some innocent creature have already suffered at his hands. And there's no reason why another should.

"It's all clear enough now. He remembered, no doubt, that he'd told me his secret, and so he's running this job on the quiet and have doubtless forged good reasons for Dinah's ear why they should bolt presently, instead of proclaiming the thing like decent people would. It's because Maynard be married that he's doing this; and now good chance puts the secret into the hands of honest men and we must act according. I always leave a rogue to Providence myself; but in this case there's a victim, and the victim must be saved."

They talked and poured their indignation into

the moonlight. Johnny abounded in drastic suggestions. He desired, above all, to face Maynard with Dinah, then let her hear the truth and beat the cowman before her. But one, who as yet knew the least of Dinah, raised a question.

"How if he's told her and she's willing to chance it and don't care?" asked Robert.

Mr. Stockman protested.

"You little understand the sort she is. She'd die rather than sink to such a deed. No; he's caught her with a parcel of lies, and he merits a pretty good punishment no doubt. You might say the loss of her will be punishment enough; but there's more to it than that, I dare say."

"By God, yes!" vowed Johnny.

"If he's caught and headed off in time, the law can't touch him," said Robert.

"Then 'tis for us to take the law in our own hands," added Johnny, "and we will."

Joe warned him.

"All in good time," he answered. "It's life or death for Dinah, and therefore we be called to act; but what we shall do and how we shall both save her and be evens with this rogue will take some planning. Rough justice must be done, I grant. He must have rope enough to hang himself with, and he must get the surprise of his life presently; but we must be clever, else we'll spoil all. I've got ideas, but he's a downy chap and nobody must do anything to make him smell a rat."

They abounded in suggestions and Johnny pointed a danger.

"While we're talking and planning," he said, "they may give us the slip any night and be out of reach and vanished off the earth so far as we're

concerned. And I say this: 'tis time we knowed what was in their letters. They be keeping apart very clever indeed, so as nobody should link up their names, though my sister always swore they was up to something; but they write, and Jane has watched Dinah go up for a letter more'n half a dozen times; and now it's time we know what's doing, else we'll get left."

"To look into a knave's letters to frustrate his tricks be no crime, I reckon," admitted Robert Withycombe. "What d'you say, Mr. Stockman?"

Joe agreed that to read the secret correspondence was permissible, for Dinah's sake.

Then the younger men went their way to Buckland, and John, leaving the brothers there, started for home. He passed Maynard on the way and guessed that he had left, or brought, a letter. Much he longed to challenge him, and fully he intended to play an active part in the future proceedings; but he hid his secret knowledge, and said 'Good night' and passed down the hill, while the unsuspecting cowman, who had just posted a letter to Dinah, responded with friendly voice.

But Maynard did not overtake his master, and, hearing Tom's slow voice droning in the kitchen with thin interjections from Soosie-Toosie, he retired on returning home.

Indeed matters of some moment for Joe awaited him, for the time brought his thoughts sharply back to himself. Susan hastened to pour out his evening drink when he came back, and Thomas, who always rose to his feet when his master entered the kitchen, now asked if he might be permitted to say a few words.

He spoke and Susan fluttered about in the

background, while Joe listened and sipped from a glass of spirits and water.

"You see things be risen to a crisis," began Tom, "and I feel very much that the time's ripe. Because to-day, by the post, there came a very fine offer of work for me to a gentleman's farm nigh Exeter. Everything done regardless, and good money and a cottage. So now's the appointed time to speak, and Susan and me, we've come by an idea."

"It don't much matter putting your ideas before me. You'll do as you want to do."

"No," said Thomas; "in reason we want to do your will if it can be done. You've been very harsh of late, master, and, of course, I can well understand your feelings about losing Susan. But I never shall see why you was so cruel rude about it. You may treat people like dirt, if you do it kindly, and they won't mind; but if you call 'em dirt, then they get a bit restive; and restive I've got, and so have she. But here it is—an offer in a very friendly spirit; and we haven't come to it without a lot of thinking and balancing the bright side against the dark."

"But there's one little thing, father," began Susan, and Mr. Palk stopped her.

"Leave all to me," he said, "I'll set it out. There's several little things, for that matter, and if the master don't see his way, so be it. First, there's what we be offering, and next there's the conditions to set against it. And we offer to stop after we'm married and to go on just as usual. As a son-in-law I know you've got no use for me; but as a hossman, you've been suited. And as a hossman I'll willingly bide and do all I know regular and steadfast for the same money as I'm

getting now. And I pray God, if that happened, you'd come to find me a good son-in-law likewise. And that means your darter bides at your right hand so long as you want her there."

"I wish it too, with all my heart, father," declared Susan. "I'd be lost away from you, and worriting all the time to know whose hands you were got in. And marrying Thomas won't make no difference, except there'll be two to think about you instead of one."

Mr. Stockman puffed his pipe and showed by no expression that he appreciated the proposal.

"I'll give you this credit," he said, "I dare say you mean well."

"No two people ever meant better, father."

"And now for the powder. I expect that, even if I was to see my way, you've got a barrellful of ugly things you'll demand. And I tell you at once that it just hangs on a razor-edge whether the idea be good enough as it stands, without any conditions to it at all. I should have conditions also, and one of them would be that you undertook to stop and not change your minds presently, or bolt off and leave me old and helpless."

"Never," answered Susan. "It's understood we don't go unless you wish it."

"And now your conditions, Palk, if you please."

"There ain't no powder about 'em, but only right and reason," said Thomas, "and be it as 'twill, there's only three of 'em. Firstly, that we have a proper, human wedding, all joyous and cheerful, with you smiling and a few neighbours to the spread after, and a nice send-off; secondly, that we be allowed ten clear days for a honeymoon round about somewhere; and thirdly, and lastly,

that Susan, when she comes home, be allowed a virgin girl under her, to help the labour of the house. Just a maid-of-all-work, as any other married woman would have for her dignity. That's all we ask, master. Susan you know, and you've often said she was the light of the house, and she wants so to continue; and I do believe, when you get to know me better and see how I go on and how I treat Susan, that you'll come to feel a kinder feeling for me also."

"Don't say 'no' without thinking over it and giving us the benefit of your wisdom, dear father," pleaded Soosie-Toosie, her large eyes fixed upon him.

"I never say 'no' to anything, without thinking it over, Susan. 'Tis all the other way, and I'm prone to give people the benefit of the doubt too often. I'm one for the long view, as you know. I'll look all round it."

CHAPTER XXXV

FOR RIGHT AND JUSTICE

JOE STOCKMAN decided that he must submit to the proposition of Thomas and his daughter. He declared that the decision was marked solely by affection for Susan, and a determination that his son-in-law should have every opportunity to show his worth under the new conditions. He also let it be known how this arrangement was his own idea and, indeed, mentioned it in several quarters as a fact before he informed the lovers that he was agreeable. This matter settled, Joe, who was really much relieved, modified his gloom, and, to the surprise of those most concerned, proceeded with his part of the contract in a spirit not unamiable. He planned a substantial entertainment for the wedding-day, permitted Susan to secure a maid, and decreed that the honeymoon might last a fortnight.

"I've drawn the sting of the trouble," he confessed to himself.

And then, two days before the wedding, he received certain secret information concerning the matter of Lawrence Maynard. He expected it, for during the same week Maynard had specified a date for leaving.

Then came the vital news from Jane, who dipped

into the secret letter-box from time to time and skimmed the lovers' letters to glean facts. These she had now learned, and they embraced the time of departure and details concerning it.

Thus Jane and John, with the Withycombe brothers and Mr. Stockman, heard what was planned, and the younger conspirators now waited for Joe to determine the actions to be taken. For him zest had already dwindled out of the adventure. He had secured a new cowman and the maid-of-all-work was skilled in the dairy; therefore Joe felt satisfied, so far as his own comfort and welfare were concerned. But there remained Dinah to be saved, and various courses offered themselves, the simplest being to make all publicly known at once.

Joe, however, decided to take another party into the secret before any final action, and he was inspired to do so by the visit of Arthur Chaffe, who arrived at this time to look into the matter of the dry rot in the stables.

They met and conversed on various subjects, beginning, English fashion, with the weather.

"An early autumn," said Joe. "The leaves be falling in the topmost trees a'ready."

"I wish one old leaf would fall," answered the carpenter. "It's among the saddest things I've known that Ben Bamsey lives on—a poor spectrum and shadow of his former self. A very harrowing thing for all concerned, and I've prayed on my knees daily, for a month now, that it may please God to take him. What a man prays for will show you the measure of his wits, Joe, and the nature of his character; and for my part I've always made it a habit to pray for others more than for myself, and found it a very good rule."

"No doubt, no doubt, Arthur. But most people have looked upon Ben as dead ever since last spring. There's only the outer case of the man left: the works be gone. And a good thing here and there. He's took from some shocks and surprises. Run your eye over this job and see what's to be done, then I'll have a tell with you about something else. Right must be done in a certain quarter; but the question is how best to do it."

Chaffe proceeded, and when he had settled the matter of the dry rot he spoke of the approaching wedding and declared his immense satisfaction that Soosie-Toosie would stop with her father.

"It's like your good sense, and there's no doubt at all you've done a wise thing. And Thomas Palk's mind be opening out very well, I find. He's a very good man and, though old for a learner, can't fail to enlarge."

"So I believe, and so I acted," answered Joe; "and now list to me, Arthur, and face a very critical affair. I'll tell you now, and after a bit of dinner, which you'll take with me, please, you can say what you think about it."

Mr. Chaffe protested at stopping for dinner. He was desperately busy and begged to be allowed to return home; but Joe would not suffer it.

"No," he said, "a soul be in the balance, Arthur, and I never yet heard you put your work before the welfare of a soul."

"If a soul's the matter, you must speak and I must hear," answered the old man; and then he listened to the story, from the moment of Maynard's arrival at Falcon Farm up to the present, and the secret flight planned to take place within ten days.

"Maynard goes from me," concluded Joe, "and the next morning he meets Orphan Dinah at Shepherd's Cross, on Holne Moor. From there they get down to the in-country, take train for Plymouth, at Brent I expect, and sail that night, or the next day, to Australia. A very simple and easy plan; but of course it ain't going to happen, and the question is how best to stop it in a righteous and seemly fashion."

Mr. Chaffe was much concerned.

"Who can say he's ever fathomed man or woman?" he asked. "This throws a light into darkness, Joe, and shows me many things that have troubled me. Not about Dinah, for she's above-board and a good Christian by nature and up-bringing; but about Maynard. He's foxed her into this dark and dangerous deed. No doubt the man have made her love him, and love blinds the best. There's a lot to thank God for, however. You can see Providence looking far ahead as usual. For if Maynard hadn't confided the truth to you years ago, he'd have brazened it out and committed bigamy in our midst no doubt."

"He would—the rascal; and I feel his crime did ought to be punished. He's tried to do a blackguard act, and it is for us just men to make him feel his proper reward and chasten the wretch. But seeing that I've fallen out with him already in a manner of speaking, when he gave notice, I'm in the position where it wouldn't become me to smite him, because people would say it was revenge. And so I put it to you, who stand for nothing but the cause of religion and justice."

Mr. Chaffe nodded.

"A very proper line to take. And I might, of

course, go in my turn to higher ones. You see it's a matter of State and Church both, Joe. This man be out to break the law and ruin an innocent and trusting woman; and he's also flouting righteousness and planning a great sin. We must rise to the proper answer, if I can think of the right one. And if I can't, then we must hand it over to the lawful authorities."

"No," said Mr. Stockman. "In my view that would be paltry. We've got to keep the man and woman apart and read him a bitter lesson. That's well in our power without going to the police. They couldn't lock him up if he hadn't done the crime, so it's for us to make justice on the spot and fall on the man like the trump of doom, just when he thinks he's triumphed. That's how I see it. Just crush him, like you'd crush a long-cripple,¹ and leave him to his bad conscience. And as for Dinah, she'll soon forget her troubles in thankfulness to God for her great escape."

"It calls for a fine touch," declared Arthur. "There's no doubt our duty stands before us, Joe. Your idea of falling on the man like the crack of doom be good on the whole. But we mustn't overdo it, or forget we're sinful creatures ourselves. But the right thought will certainly come to my mind, since we be acting in the name of religion."

"I'm all for mercy as a rule," answered Stockman; "but not in this case. Mercy's barred out, because of Maynard's wickedness."

"There don't seem no very loud call for mercy certainly, when you think of the far-reaching thing he's led the poor girl into. No; we may stop at justice, I reckon. I see the line, I believe;

¹ *Long-cripple*—viper.

but I'll take it afore my Maker. We want a bit of physical force—we may even have to handle him, as I see it."

"We may."

"For the sake of argument, would John Bamsey and the Withycombe brothers be strong enough to withstand him?"

"If they surprised the man, they would. Robert Withycombe's a huge, strong chap. What be in your mind?"

"Wait till it takes a clearer shape. Put by the thought till after the wedding. That must be all happiness and joy; and when that's well over and the happy pair are away, we'll turn to Maynard. We must come to it with clean hands, Joe, as humble, willing tools of Providence. There's a bright side, even for him, and I hope in time he'll live to see what we saved him from."

"We must have a masterpiece of cleverness, and I'll think too," added Mr. Stockman. "We must just teel a trap for the beggar and catch him alive. And we must spare Dinah all we can."

"As to Dinah," answered Mr. Chaffe, "if what I see rising up in my mind be the right course, we may have to give Dinah a pinch also. You must remember that Dinah's only a part of human nature, and we can read her feelings very clear when this bursts upon her."

"How can we?" asked Joe. "I never can read any woman's feelings very clear at any time. They never feel about anything same as we do, and their very eyes ban't built to look at the shape and colour of things as ours be. They're a different creation, in fact."

"A different creation, no," answered Arthur. "They feel and suffer same as us, and Dinah

Waycott, afore this great downfall, will take the ordinary course of human nature. Her Christianity will help her to keep a tight hand on herself; but, being a woman, she'll want to give Lawrence Maynard a bit of her mind, and he'll deserve it and didn't ought to be spared it."

Mr. Stockman was rather impressed.

"By God, that's true," he said. "And I'm rather glad you thought of it and not me, Arthur. But coming from you, of course it can be no more than justice. It's just a thing a bachelor might have hit upon. The average married man would have felt a twinge of mercy."

"We've got to save Maynard's soul alive, and seeing the size of the wound upon it, we should be weak to botch our work for the sake of sparing him or ourselves pain. For that's what mercy to the wicked often comes to, Joe. We forgive and forget for our own comfort far too often, and let a sinner off his medicine only because we don't like to see the ugly face he makes over it."

"In fact, mercy would be weakness and false kindness," admitted Joe. "And if we want a couple more strong men presently, I know the proper ones."

"There again, we must take care our feet don't slip," answered Mr. Chaffe. "As a lesson and warning it may have to be told about, for the sake of the young; but, against that, we may find, for Dinah's sake, that it might not be convenient to make it a public affair. And now we'll put this away for the Lord to work on, Joe. We'll talk of the wedding for ten minutes afore I be off. How would you like a triumphant arch over the lychgate to church? It can very easy be done."

"No," said Mr. Stockman. "I'm going

through with it as a father should, Arthur. I'm doing my part, and I'm giving Susan away in church, and I've asked all the neighbours, including five outlying friends of Palk's. But, between you and me, I don't hunger for large diversions, nor yet triumphant arches over the lichgate, nor anywhere else. I want for it to be over and them back home, so as I may see how it's going on and what measure of peace and comfort I can count upon in the future. The time for triumphant arches be when a pair have stood each other ten years, and can still go on with it."

"Keep your nerve and give 'em every fair chance and trust God," said Mr. Chaffe.

"Be sure of that," answered Joe. "I only wish I felt so sure that, hunting in a couple, they'll do their duty to me so well as I've done mine to them."

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE WEDDING DAY

A KINDLY SPIRIT might have been moved somewhat to observe Soosie-Toosie's wonder and delight when wedding presents began to appear before her marriage. She could hardly remember being the recipient of any gift in her life, and she felt amazed, almost prostrate, under the sense of obligation awakened by a tea-set from Green Hayes, a metal teapot and milk jug from Melinda, a *History of Palestine* with coloured pictures from Mr. Chaffe, and other presents only less handsome. Thomas, too, was remembered by former friends; and the kinsmen of the Stockmans, who dwelt at Barnstaple, sent Susan an eider-down quilt of fiery scarlet and green, which she secretly determined should comfort the couch of her father when winter returned.

Lawrence Maynard's gift took a practical form. He did not design to carry anything from England but his money and a few clothes. The remainder of his property, including a small chest of good tools, a tin trunk, and a pair of leggings, some old clothes and some boots, he gave to Thomas, who accepted them gladly.

"Us wish you very well, though Joe do not,"

said Mr. Palk, "and I hope some day, when you've got time, you'll write to me and tell about Australia—especially how hosses be out there."

The wedding was well attended, and Melinda, who came over in the morning to help Soosie-Toosie with her new dress, declared that the bride, in a steel-blue gown and a large white hat with a white feather in it, had never looked so well. Mr. Palk was also clad in blue, of another shade. His wedding garment was of ultramarine shot with a yellow thread, and he wore a yellow tie with a green shamrock sprigged upon it. The best man came from Newton Abbot. He was older by many years than the bridegroom, and declared a score of times that he had known Mr. Palk from childhood, and that an honester man didn't walk.

At the wedding were the family of Withycombes; while from Green Hayes came John and Jane Bamsey and their mother. Dinah was with them at church, but did not attend the wedding breakfast, asking rather to return to her foster-father at home. Those who understood were not surprised to learn her wish to do so. Mr. Chaffe was present and proposed the health of bride and bridegroom in words that made Soosie-Toosie shed a few tears despite herself. Then she cut the cake, declaring it was a terrible pity to spoil such a pretty thing.

They drove off in their blue attire presently, and the last seen of them was Mr. Palk waving his new grey wide-awake from one window of the wedding chariot and Susan fluttering a handkerchief from the other.

Many curious eyes rested on Maynard during the course of the meal, but he was innocent of the fact and preserved a cheerful demeanour. Those who watched him mused, according to the measure of their intelligence, as to what was proceeding in his mind; but none guessed; all the conspirators rather found in his brown face and dark eyes evidence of a devious and lawless spirit hiding itself for its own purposes. He was in reality considering how far different would be his own doubtful nuptials in a strange land amid strange faces.

When the entertainment was at an end and most of the wedding guests had gone, certain men, by arrangement, drifted away together. Maynard, in the farmyard milking the cows, saw Mr. Stockman with Mr. Chaffe and a few others saunter over the autumnal moor and sit presently upon a flat ledge of rocks under the Beacon.

And there it was that Arthur learned the latest news concerning Maynard, the date of his departure and the hour at which, upon the day following, he would meet Dinah at their last tryst. He himself had come primed with an inspiration as to what should be done.

"Jane's thankful to God she haven't got to do no more hateful spying," said Jerry Withycombe. "But there it is. He meets her at Shepherd's Cross somewhere after six o'clock on the morning after he goes off from here."

"And at the Cross the man must face his outraged fellow-creatures," declared Mr. Chaffe. "And when Dinah comes, she shall hear the bitter truth. All be clear in my mind's eye now, and I see a deed which must be done in the spirit of justice only—else it will fail. We be the

instruments, and if any man have any hate or ill will towards the evil-doer rather than the evil deed, then he'd better stand down and let another take his place. For Maynard have got to be handled, and when he fights against us with the whole force of his baffled wickedness we must act without passion and feel no more rage in our hearts than the Saviour did when He cast the devil out of a poor, suffering creature."

"'Tis a young man's job," said Joe, after Arthur had described his purpose, "and we can very well leave it to them. Us older blades needn't be called to be there at all, I reckon."

"I wouldn't say there was any cause for you to be," answered Arthur, "but I shall certainly be there. I be the voice that will reach his heart and his conscience, I hope, when the rough work's done and the blow has fallen. And there's the woman to be thought upon. I shall take Orphan Dinah back to her home when all is over."

"'Tis a matter of the man's fighting powers," said Robert Withycombe. "No doubt I could manage him with Jerry's help; but I reckon we don't want a scrap and blood about, or broken heads. Be we three men—Jerry and John and me—strong enough to make him yield without a dust-up?"

"And why not a dust-up?" asked Johnny; but Arthur admonished him.

"If you feel like that, you'd best not to go, Bamsey," he said. "I tell you again that all's spoiled if we don't carry this thing out in a proper manner. Robert be right. The man had far better feel he is up against a force beyond his strength to oppose. And if you three ban't equal to it, we must get in somebody else."

"All depends on him," said Mr. Stockman. "If he was to put up a fight, then there'd be knocks and fur flying, no doubt. You want to drop on the man like a flap of lightning; but if it's going to be a rough and tumble first, and him perhaps escaping after all, then I say get another pair of hands, so as he will see it's no good opposing you. He must feel 'tis just as vain to make a fuss about it as a man feels when he wakes up and knows he's going to be hanged inside the hour."

"I wish we was going to hang him," whispered John to Jerry.

They decided that it would be wise to add a powerful member to their number, in order that Maynard would be prevented from making any effort to evade his punishment.

"Abel Callicott will do very nice," said John. "He's a prize-fighter and he's to Ashburton now. If I tell him we're out to punish a rogue, he'll help."

"They prize - fighters are generally good-tempered creatures and often religious," admitted Mr. Chaffe. "If he'll come in the right frame of mind, well and good. We must all be on the spot and out of sight before they arrive. In fact, to be safe, us will do wisely to get up there the night before. We'll forgather at Shepherd's Cross and we must leave a good margin of time for fear of accidents."

They talked thoughtfully and seriously. Arthur Chaffe insisted on the gravity of what they purposed. They worked objectively with the facts and had no subjective glimmering of the reasons that lay behind the facts in the lives of those about to commit this deed. Here was a married man deceiving a single woman—a frank situation, that

left no place in the argument for any extenuations. One who could plot thus had put himself beyond the pale.

Each felt worthy of the occasion. Joe Stockman and John Bamsey alone might have been accused of mixed motives, and the master of Falcon Farm would not have admitted them. As for John, in the atmosphere of the conference, even he abated something of his fire—at least openly. In secret he trusted that Maynard would fight, and that it might be his privilege to administer a quietus. But, indeed, no great possibility in this direction offered, since there must be four men to one in any case. Johnny abandoned much thought of the man, therefore, and centred on the future of the woman.

For the rest, Robert and Jerry merely proposed to do what now appeared a duty; while as for Mr. Chaffe, no more placable spirit ever planned how to chasten a sinner for his own good. He was much pleased with what he had arranged, yet desired no credit afterwards.

“We must be silent, neighbours, when all is over,” he said. “‘Unto God be the praise’; we don’t want none.”

CHAPTER XXXVII

SHEPHERD'S CROSS

THE NEW COWMAN came on the day before Maynard left Falcon Farm and Mr. Stockman was satisfied with his ability and intelligence. And then fell the moment when Joe shook hands and bade Lawrence farewell. He pictured the experiences that awaited his old servant and found it in his heart to be sorry for him. Only thought of the enormity of the deed he had so deliberately planned steeled Mr. Stockman.

"I shall hear tell of you, no doubt," were the last words that he said at parting.

To Holne went Maynard, put up with an acquaintance for that night, and, at five o'clock on the following morning, set out to meet Dinah at Shepherd's Cross, a mediæval monument that marked a forgotten way of old. There Dinah, whose departure was designed to be secret, would meet him, and together they would descend to Brent, where neither was known, and so reach Plymouth, whence their steamer sailed that night.

The morning dawned fine and touched with frost. The wind blew gently from the east. There was no sting in it, but it created an inevitable haze, and distance quickly faded under its blue-grey mantle, while at hand all shone clear

and bright in the sunrise fires. The heavy dew of a cloudless night was not yet dried off the herbage, and the grass, nibbled to a close and springy velvet by sheep and rabbits, spread emerald green between the masses of heather and furze, where the lover climbed Dene Moor. Still the autumn heath shone with passages of colour; but into the rich pink of a month earlier had crept a russet warmth, where innumerable heather bells passed to death with a redness that drowned the purple. As yet this new colour was genial in tone, shone in the sunlight and glowed along the reaches of the fading fern; but a time approached when from ruddy to sere the countless blossom must sink. Then the light would fade and the flowers wither, till winter winds tinkled in their grey inflorescence and sang the song of another dying year. Now only the splendour of their passing and the pale gold, where brake died in patches amid the standing fern, prophesied changes to come. A few raddled sheep browsed their morning meal and made harmony with the bright colours of the dawn, while Maynard, stooping, picked up the wing feather of a carrion crow and reflected that this was the last black plume he would ever find to clean his pipe on Dartmoor. He was sorry to leave it, but had found no time for regret until this moment. He had formed a hazy and nebulous picture of his future environment, yet knew that it could in no way resemble this. But he remembered Dinah's attitude and her expressed joy that the Vale should be left behind them and all things become new.

Now he centred upon her and again thin shadows crept through his mind. For good or evil they had listened to their own hearts alone;

but he still found questions asking themselves and doubts limning deep in his soul when he thought of her; he still felt a smoulder of indignation in himself that this cup should be forced upon them. There was an ingredient of bitterness, a dumb question why fate should have called him and Dinah to do a thing against which he rebelled, and the doing of which was an outrage upon her love of truth and directness. She might make light of the burden, but he resented the fact that she was called to bear it. Even yet he did not perceive that no shadow whatever existed for Dinah. The thing that still haunted him like a fog, like the robe of the east wind hanging on the skirts of the moor, must, he felt, be appreciated by her also. Regret for the inevitable thus found a place in his mind despite his reason, because it sprang from foundations other than his reason.

Swinging forward with an ash sapling in his right hand and a leathern portmanteau in his left, Lawrence presently saw his goal ahead. Sunshine played over the blue hazes and touched the grey summit of Shepherd's Cross, where the ancient stone stood erect and solitary on the heath. It reared not far distant from rough, broken ground, where Tudor miners had streamed the hillside for tin in Elizabethan days. The relic glimmered with lichens, black and gold and ash colour. Upon its shaft stuck red hairs, where roaming cattle had rubbed themselves. It stood the height of a tall man above the water-worn trough at its foot, and the cross was still perfect, with its short, squat arms unbroken, though weathered in all its chamfering by centuries of storm.

Here he sat down, knit his brows to scan the northern slope of the hill, whereon Dinah must presently appear, and wondered how far she might have already tramped upon her way. He had found his own climb from Holne shorter than he imagined and was at their place of meeting before the time.

Then, suddenly, behind him he heard feet shuffling and turned to see five men spring up from their hiding-places at hand. They were familiar faces that he saw, and for a moment no suspicion that they were here upon his account entered the mind of Maynard. It occurred to him that Shepherd's Cross might be a meeting-place for hounds at this early hour. Yet he did not know that cub-hunting was yet begun. And then he marked behind the four now beside him, the tall, thin figure of Arthur Chaffe—one who would certainly attend no meet of hounds.

He was not left long in doubt. The men brought ropes. They closed round him, as he rose to confront them, caught his arms, dragged him to the cross and, with the celerity of executioners, quickly had him fast bound by ankles and wrists against the granite—crucified thereto with his arms extended upon the arms of the cross and a dozen coils of rope about his shoulders, trunk and legs. John Bamsey handled one wrist and saw that his cords bit.

Here was Mr. Chaffe's inspiration; that the erring man should be lifted against the Christian emblem of salvation, for his heart to be taken by storm, and for Dinah to behold the great event. He apprehended a wondrous purification in Maynard as the result of this punishment and he hoped that he himself might have time to say

the necessary words and utter a trumpet note in the sinner's ear before his victim reached Shepherd's Cross.

The men had come by night and hidden as near the tryst as possible. Now they completed their work and stood off, some grinning, some scowling, at the prisoner. His hat had fallen, and his ash sapling and his leather bag lay together where he had sat. The light of day shone upon his bare head and he stared at the faces round him, still dazed and silent before the surprise of their attack. But though he said nothing, others spoke freely enough and some chaffed and some derided.

"You didn't think you was going to get chained up this morning, you dirty, runaway dog!" said John Bamsey, while Robert Withycombe laughed.

"You ban't the first thief as have found yourself on a cross—eh, my bold hero? Not but what a cross be almost too holy a sign to rope such a scamp upon."

"You—you that thought you could fox an honest woman and turn her away from an honest man! You wicked lying trash, as ought to have the skin tanned off your bones!" roared John.

But the thunder did not make Maynard shrink. He turned his head to the veteran and spoke.

"What does this mean, Mr. Chaffe?" he asked.

Jerry Withycombe began to answer him, but John took the words out of his mouth. Jerry was too mild for this occasion.

"It means that I happened to find the wrens' nest, and I told about it, and John's sister found 'twas you plotting against Orphan Dinah and——"

"It means that all the world knows you're a married man, you blasted wretch," stormed

Johnny. "It means you kindiddled the woman away from me with lies and cunning and thought to get her out of England and ruin her, and then, no doubt, fling her off, like you flung off your lawful wife. It means you're found out for what you are—the scum of the earth. And she's going to know it, and see you where you stand, and hear where your filthy plots and wickedness was going to land her. And if she don't sclow down your face for you when she knows and tear your damned eyes out, she ought to!"

Maynard looked at the furious man, but did not answer. Then Mr. Chaffe intervened.

"That'll do, John Bamsey," he said. "Us have carried out our work in a high spirit so far and we don't want no crooked language."

"Crooked language be the right sort for crooked deeds, I reckon," declared Mr. Callicott, the prize-fighter—a sturdy and snake-headed young man who had assisted the others. "If it's true this bloke's married and was going to run away with an innocent girl, then you can't talk too coarse to him, I reckon."

"You're right to be angered, but righteous wrath must keep its temper, Callicott," explained Arthur. "Now hear me talk to the man and show him how it is with him. He be dazed, as you see, and stares through us and looks beyond, as if we was ghosts."

"He knows very well we ban't ghosts," said Jerry.

"You see him," continued Mr. Chaffe, as though he were lecturing on a specimen—"you see him in the first flush of his surprise—gazing out at the risen sun and too much knocked over even to make a case."

"What sort of case should he make—a man that meant to seduce another chap's sweetheart?" asked John Bamsey.

"If he haven't already," suggested Mr. Callicott.

"Hear me, and let him hear me," answered Arthur; and then he turned to Maynard.

"You ask why we have laid in wait for you and done this," he said. "But you know why we have done it only too well, you bad man, and the true wonder in your mind is to guess how we found out. Don't stare into the sky, nor yet over the hill for that poor woman as you meant to destroy body and soul. Just you turn your wits to me, Lawrence Maynard, and listen; and then tell me, before God, if you've got any just quarrel with any man among us. And this is what you done—you knowing you was married and had a wife you'd thrown over. You come here and make a woman care for you; but since your watchful Maker has already opened your mouth, so that your master heard you was married, you know you couldn't pretend to wed her honest before men, but must hatch lies for her and make a plot. And her love was quick, no doubt, to think nothing you could do or say was wrong, so she consented to follow you to foreign parts, where her shame might be hid and where she'd be in your power—to cherish or desert according as your fancy took you. For well you understood that she could never be no more than your leman and at your mercy. That's what you planned, poor man; but God in His might chose different, and willed to give you up to your fellow-creatures and led this young Jerry Withycombe to find your secret, so we learned what you was going to do.

And it is my ordinance that you stand here now tied to the Cross of your Redeemer, Lawrence Maynard. And may the cross enter into your heart and save your soul alive yet. And then you'll see we five Christians be the willing instruments of Heaven, and have put ourselves to this task in the spirit of our Master. We be here, not only to save Dinah, but to save you; and you can say 'Amen' to that, and I hope your Father in Heaven will touch your hard heart to bend and see what we've saved you from."

"In fact you're getting out of it a damned sight softer than you deserve, and a damned sight softer than you would if I had my way," growled Bamsey; but the sailor stopped him.

"Shut up, John, and let Mr. Chaffe talk," he said. "What he tells be very fine, and us must take a high hand with the man."

"We're all sinners," continued Arthur, "and nobody more so than you, John Bamsey, so I'll beg you hold in and let me do my part."

Then he droned on to the roped cowman.

"Evils must come, but woe be to them that bring them. And I hope it will be a case of 'Go and sin no more,' in the words of the Saviour of us all, Maynard. All things go round and round, you must know. The worm gnaws the nettle that the butterfly may rise up into the sunshine; and the butterfly rises up into the sunshine that the worm may gnaw the nettle; but we, as have immortal souls, be called to deny and defy nature, and lead captivity captive, and trample on the adder and the basilisk. And you didn't care that a young and harmless woman, who was God's business quite as much as you yourself—you didn't care——"

"She be coming," said Robert Withycombe. His sailor's eyes had seen Dinah still far distant. She was clad in a brick-red gown—her best—and carried a basket of yellow, woven cane that made a bright spot on the heath.

"Yes," said Arthur Chaffe. "Like a lamb to the slaughter the virgin cometh, Lawrence Maynard; and I hope 'tis your voice she will hear, telling how God hath watched over her, and how right and religion have won another victory."

But the prisoner preserved an obstinate silence. He seemed to be rapt away out of sight or sound of Mr. Chaffe and the rest. His eyes rested on Dinah; his ears appeared to be sealed for any attention he paid to his captors. Arthur drew his wind and the others spoke.

"He's waiting for her to come," said Mr. Callicott. "He be going to say his say afore the woman and don't care a damn for you, master."

"He'm in a dream," murmured Jerry. "I don't believe he's hearing what Mr. Chaffe be pouring at him."

Then Dinah, who had long seen the group, made haste and dropped her basket and hastened to Maynard, ignoring the rest.

Her face was scarlet and she could hardly speak for the throbbing of her heart.

"Lawrence — Lawrence — what's this?" she asked. "What have they done?"

She had left her home before dawn, unknowing that another was awaking also at Green Hayes and had heard her go. Her last act was to slip into Benjamin Bamsey's room, where he slept alone, and kiss the unconscious old man upon his temple. Then she had gone; and Jane had

heard her do so and seen the vague shadow of her descend the garden path and vanish into the farm yard. Mrs. Bamsey was kept in ignorance of Dinah's plans, but when morning came and they sat at breakfast her daughter informed her of all that had happened and told her that she might expect to see her father's foster-daughter return with Mr. Chaffe in an hour or two. Faith Bamsey took the revelation calmly enough and showed no great emotion; while Jane roamed restlessly through the morning and desired to see Jerry and hear of what had happened on the Moor.

Now, in answer to Dinah, Maynard, who was suffering physical pain from his position and his bonds, answered very quietly, while the men round the pair listened to him.

"They have done what they thought was right, Dinah. They found out that we were going to leave England together, and they heard from Mr. Stockman that I was married. And they took a natural view and thought I was deceiving you as to that. So they lay in wait and tied me here until you heard the truth."

"I know the truth," she said. "I know a deeper truth than any they can know. I know that in God's sight——"

"Stop!" cried Arthur Chaffe. "Listen to me, Orphan Dinah, and thank Heaven on your knees that your fellow-creatures have saved you from the evil to come."

She looked at all of them with a flaming indignation.

"Did you set 'em to this dirty task—old as you are? Did you think so badly of this man that you dreamed he could do me harm? Did you plot behind his back, when you'd found out our

simple secrets? Did you plan this cruel disgrace for one that never harmed you or anybody?"

"He harmed us all, Dinah, and I beg you'll keep your temper," answered Arthur. "You don't know what we saved you from."

"Be you shadows, or real people, you grinning men?" she asked, turning upon the others. "Do you know what you've done in your brutal strength? Do you know you've wronged and tortured a man whose boots you ain't worthy to black?"

"Hear the truth and don't be an idiot!" answered John Bamsey.

"'Truth'! What do you know of the truth? You—shallow, know-nought creatures, that make silly words stand for truth? It's a lie to say he's wedded. Is every man wedded that's married? Have none of you ever seen married people that never felt or knew the meaning of marriage? 'Tis for pity to the likes of you, beyond the power of understanding, that we took these pains; and now we shan't run away behind your backs, but go before your faces—a parcel of zanies."

"Let the man speak," said Mr. Chaffe. "I command that you speak, Lawrence Maynard. The woman's beside herself and dead to reason. 'Tis your bounden duty to speak for yourself."

"Loose him, then, and he'll speak fast enough," cried Dinah. "Who be you—a cowardly, hulking pack of ignorant clods to lay fingers on him! If you had sense and decency and any proper Christianity in you, you'd have gone to work very different and spared me this, and him too. You'd have come to us and bid us speak. What do you make us? Loose him, I tell you—ban't one among you man enough to understand that I

know all there is to know about this—that it's my work we're going, my work—me that loves him and worships him, and knows the honourable chap he is. God! If you could see yourselves as I see you—meddling bullies, you'd sink in the earth. Loose him and then listen to him."

Lawrence spoke quietly to Robert Withycombe.

"You see how it is. Don't keep me trussed here no longer. I'm in pain and no good can come of it. If you care to listen, then I'll speak. I'm very glad to let you know how things are, for you've got a credit for sense; so has Mr. Chaffe."

"It's a free country," said Mr. Callicott. "You chaps seem as if you'd made trouble where there isn't none."

He opened a knife to sever the ropes that held Maynard. None attempted to stop him save John, and then the sailor came between.

"Cut him loose, Callicott."

Mr. Chaffe was deeply dismayed and made an effort to save the position.

"Orphan Dinah," he said, "for the love of your Saviour, and your foster-father, and right and religion, come home with me this minute. I can't believe what you say, for you know not what you say. Does the man deny he's married? That's all I want to know; and if he is, then do you mean to tell me you're going to live with him? There it is in brutal words and——"

"The brutal words are yours, because you're bound up in words and know nought about the truth of what this means, Arthur Chaffe," answered Maynard, who now stood free. "Do you think two people who have set out to share their lives for evermore didn't count the cost

every way? Believe me, we did, so understand that what seems wicked to you ban't wicked to us. I don't count, but Dinah does. She knows every single word of the truth."

"Come," said Dinah. "We're not called to lay our hearts bare for these men. Let 'em know there's as good and honourable and Christian people in the world as themselves; and if I, knowing far, far deeper than they know, am proud to be your wife in God's sight for ever and ever, who else matters, and who else shall judge? You be no more than the buzzing of gnats to us, and there's no power in one of you to sting this man, or me."

"Think, think what you're doing, Dinah," pleaded Mr. Chaffe.

"And haven't I thought, and don't I know a million times more than you can, or ever will? Understand before we go. This man was never false to any woman—never—never. He don't know the meaning of falseness. He never looked at me, John Bamsey, till I'd left you, and I never thought of him till long, long after I was free. And when I loved him, he told me why he could not marry me, and I saw that it was moonshine and only a pair of weak, worthless creatures would be frightened and part for that—only cowards feared of their neighbours and the laws—laws that selfish idiots bleat about and want kept, because to torture other people won't hurt their comfort or cloud their homes. What do you know of marriage—one of you? What do you know of the dark, deadly things that may come between people and separate 'em far as heaven from hell, while parsons and lawyers and old bachelors and old women want 'em chained

together to rot—for Christ's sake! Look deeper—look deeper!”

While the men stood silent, Maynard picked up his stick and bag and Dinah's basket.

Mr. Chaffe had sunk upon a stone and was wiping his eyes with a red pocket-handkerchief.

“You!” he said. “You brought up by God-fearing people, Dinah!”

“And fear God I always shall; but not man,” she answered scornfully. “Did these chaps do this because they feared God? Ask them!”

She took her package from Maynard and he spoke.

“Have no fear that any harm be done to righteousness,” he said. “No woman knows her duty to her Maker better than this woman, or her duty to her neighbour. If ever I was in doubt, and I have been, my doubts be cleared afore what you men have done to-day, and I thank you for that. You've shown how paltry it was to doubt, I reckon, and I doubt no more. I be the better and stronger for seeing your minds, you well-meaning chaps! My life and thought and worship belong to Dinah; and where no secrets are hid, there's no blame counted against us, and never will be, I hope.”

They turned their backs upon the listeners and went away side by side; they moved among the stones and bushes until they sank out of sight and vanished for ever from that company.

“To hell with them!” said John, “and curse all women for the sake of that blasted woman!”

But the rest did not share his passion. Only Mr. Chaffe mourned; the others were impressed at what they had heard and the prize-fighter was amused.

"A pretty parcel we look," said Callicott, "bested by that calm man and quick-tongued woman. And be damned if I ban't their side. We don't know nought about it, and if we did, very like we'd praise 'em for a bit of pluck. Anyway she knows what she's doing all right."

"If the Lord can read their hearts, it evidently don't much matter to them that we can't," declared Robert Withycombe; "and be it as it will, if he was a Turk, or Indian, the man could have two wives and no harm done. And if there's only one Almighty, Mr. Chaffe, why for should He hold it a parlous crime for us to do what a nigger across the water can do every day of the week?"

But Arthur Chaffe was too stricken to argue. He stared in great grief after the vanished man and woman.

"My God, why hast Thou forsaken them?" he moaned.

They parted presently and went their different ways, leaving Shepherd's Cross with the sunlight on its face and the severed ropes about its foot.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

RETURN FROM THE HONEYMOON

THOUGH, before the event, Mr. Chaffe had enjoined secrecy in the matter of Lawrence Maynard, yet, since the affair fell out so contrary, none obeyed him. It made a good story, and though many who heard it shared Arthur's concern, none sank into such a deep dejection as he over this trial and failure of faith. Jane Bamsey shared John's indignation that both parties had won their way; while her mother mourned with Mr. Chaffe over Dinah's downfall. For the rest, Robert Withycombe and Callicott, the boxer, related their experience in many ears, and more laughed than frowned who heard them.

The attitude of Joe Stockman was defined in a conversation held a week later with Melinda.

She came to Falcon Farm in a condition somewhat nervous, for she had great news for Joe and felt doubtful how he would take it. She had accepted the hand of Harry Ford in marriage and acknowledged to herself that propriety demanded Mr. Stockman should be the first to know her decision.

She brought a bouquet for Susan, who was returning that evening with her husband.

"Everybody's beginning a new life, seemingly,"

said Mrs. Honeysett. "And I was wishful to know your view touching Orphan Dinah, because as you think in that matter, so shall I."

But this diplomacy was wasted.

"No, no—you don't think like what I do—let's have no pretences, Melinda. And as to my late cowman, if the new one ain't so clever with women, he's quite so clever with cows. Chaffe have been up here wringing his hands, and your brother, the sailor, have told me the tale also; and on the whole I dare say it will be all right for Dinah. She come out very clear, so Robert says. They was both in deadly earnest, and now they are gone beyond reach of prayers or cusses alike, and I don't wish 'em no harm. If the time had to come again, I'd keep my mouth shut about it. Anyway they'll be married, as far as words can marry 'em, when they get to Australia; and if the world thinks you're married, that's all that matters."

"So Mr. Ford says. He's took a pretty large-minded view. In fact, nobody don't wish 'em any harm, except Jane Bamsey and her brother."

"And you be going to marry the gardener, Melinda?"

She started.

"I thought you was to be the first, after my family, to hear it, Joe."

"So I was. Robert told me last night."

"I do hope you'll feel kindly to us."

"Red to red—eh? Fire to fire when a red woman marries a red man; because it's well known when red loves red—however, I'm not one to cry danger afore it's in sight. Live and let live is my motto, and never more than now, when my own days be running out so fast,"

"Don't say that, Joe."

Mr. Stockman's age had in fact leapt up by a decade since Melinda's refusal to marry him. He now spoke of himself as a man of seventy-five and intended to behave as such, save in the matter of his own small pleasures. He was not really regretful of the situation as it had developed, and knew exceedingly well that he would be more comfortable with Soosie-Toosie than he could have been with a wife. But he intended to get something—indeed, a good deal—out of pending changes, and designed a programme for his son-in-law that embraced more work and larger responsibility. That Thomas would be equal to the coming demands he felt assured.

Joe spoke of him now.

"We must be reasonable to age. Justice the married pair will be prepared to do me; but damn it, when you be in sight of seventy-five and feel older, along of trials and disappointments, you've a right to a bit more than justice from the rising generation; and I mean to have it."

"Of course you will."

"As to you, I'll be your friend as before, Melinda, and Ford must understand I am so. There's something in me that holds out the hand of friendship again and again until seventy times seven; and in your case, though it's turning the other cheek to the smiter, still I do it."

"A proper living Christian, as we all know," declared Mrs. Honeysett, much relieved. She talked for some time and presently left, filled with admiration for Joe's sentiments.

Then came home Susan and her husband in the best of spirits, to be gratified in their turn

by the amiability of their welcome. They had often debated what form it would take, and forgot that Mr. Stockman had suffered the unexampled experience of being without his daughter for a fortnight.

Both were deeply interested in the story of Lawrence and Dinah; but while Soosie-Toosie ventured to hope that the right thing had happened, Thomas took a contrary opinion.

"Two wrongs don't make a right," he said, "nor yet two hundred. I speak as a man who now knows the dignity of the married state, and I think they've done a very wicked deed and will be punished for it. She's a lost creature, in my opinion."

"Why for, Thomas?" asked Mr. Stockman.

"Because marriage be the work of the Lord upon two human hearts," said Mr. Palk; "and when they have clove together by the plan of their Maker, they be one and can no more be set apart by any human contrivance than the growing grain from the young corn. Be God likely to make a mistake and bring two people together unless He knew they was made for each other? 'Tis only our wicked craving for novelty makes a pair think they're misfits."

"If us all waited till your age, there wouldn't be so many failures," admitted Joe, "and so long as the law don't make love a part of marriage, so long there'll be failures. But we must be merciful to circumstances so far as we can. Many marry each other as was never intended to do so by their Creator, and when such wants to part, it may often be that He'd like to see 'em allowed to do so afore the man cuts the woman's throat, or she puts poison in his tea."

"But where marriage wears like ours will, then give Heaven the credit," suggested Mrs. Palk.

"'Tis a magnificent state, in my opinion, declared Thomas, "and there'll be no shadow of turning with me and Susan. We be wonderful addicted to each other a'ready."

THE END





DATE DUE



Main

PR

5177

.076

1928

15992

